TUCKER DAN

CHARLES ROSS JACKSON

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"He received an over-ripe apple on the side of his neck."—Page 12.

Frontispiece

TUCKER DAN

By

CHARLES ROSS JACKSON

ILLUSTRATIONS BY GORDON H. GRANT

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Tucker Dan

Dedicated to

Those who have been Boys or Girls

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TUCKER DAN

CHAPTER ONE

TWO OF A KIND

OU Tuck—'f you don't come off'n that perch, and come off quick, I'll stick this pitchfork into you."

Tuck thumped his bare heels together, bent over so that he could keep his balance on the thin upper edge of the fence, and shook his head.

"Nope, Uncle Binny; the stomach ain't the place to stick a fellow; I'm wrong side to."

"I'll teach you!" exclaimed the old man as he lunged with the pitchfork in a well-simulated temper.

Tuck did not wait, but threw up his legs and fell gracefully backwards over the fence into the hay that he knew was beyond. And then as Uncle Binny peered cautiously over he received an over-ripe apple on the side of his neck, and saw his nephew Tucker making for the barn like a streak of lightning, shouting as he ran,

"Help, help,—help, Uncle Binny."

The old man did not stop to take the remains of the apple from his neck, but dropping his pitchfork, made for the swinging gate in the distance which he knew that Tucker would have to pass in order to make his escape from the farm.

But many previous escapades of the kind had sharpened Tuck's wits and made him something of a general. Besides he had not anticipated exactly that the apple would make such a perceptible hit; and was reluctant to claim the full

credit for it. He dashed through the barn, saw Mr. Binny awaiting him, and tearing off his jacket with a quick motion as he ran, flung it unexpectedly into his elder's already much abused face; and in the confusion that followed slipped out of the gate, leaving part of a suspender, some shirt and some hair in Uncle Binny's hands.

"Tucker Dan, when you come back I'll skin you alive," said the exasperated old gentleman fiercely.

"He's madder'n a hornet this time," murmured Tuck to himself. "I'll dust." And he dusted, looking neither to right, left, nor behind, but charging straight ahead for the woods. He leaped a brook and pushed his way through a corn-field in utter silence; then from the safe edge of the woods he glanced back.

"He's got my coat, and I ain't got my shoes; but I'll not go back. I think

I'll spend the night with Mickey Connor."

Meanwhile Uncle Binny cleaned his neck and returned to the house. "I wouldn't 'a' hurt the scallawag for anything, but I just had to make him think I would.—'Wrong side to! the stomach ain't the place to stick a feller'—ha, ha. No more it ain't either. That Tucker is surely a chip of the old block."

Tuck was thirteen years old, ten of which had been passed with Uncle Binny and his wife Aunt Amy. He had come to them as an orphan, the son of Binny's sister and a seafaring husband of the name of Pils. Tuck's surname therefore was Pils; but it was rarely used in his presence—by his juniors at least. When used by his elders Tuck did not mind so much, unless they used his other names at the same time. Tucker Dan Pils was all the boy would stand from anybody.

His Aunt Amy called him that twice when he was ten; and Tucker, delving into the family Bible discovered that her name was really Amelia Aurania; so the next time she called him Tucker Dan Pils he christened her Aunt A. A.—after the two first letters of these names. Aunt Amy had immediately changed to "Tuck dear"—but it was too late. The nickname stuck, and the family knew her thereafter as Aunt A. A.

When Uncle Binny reached the house his wife looked him over earnestly, and then smiled knowingly. "Binny—what you been up to?"

"I've been trying to wallop that Tuck," he said. There was still some of the apple on his collar, and as Aunt Amy caught sight of it she laughed.

"Nothing of the kind, Binny. You know you wouldn't wallop that youngster if you did catch him."

"Well, mother, he needs it."

"Maybe he does. But bless him, ain't he chopped all that wood for you on Monday; an' milked the cow; an' been awful good this week?"

"Has he? Bless him—didn't he chop his own big toe when he chopped the wood? Didn't I pay Doc a dollar for saying it wasn't dangerous?—And didn't he drink half the milk, and spill the other half into his own stomach?"

"Yes, Binny; but boys will be boys."

"That don't excuse 'em for being calves."

"Binny!"

"Amelia!"

And thus it was that many a mild quarrel over the boy terminated.

All this time Tuck, speeding through the woods, was thinking of the sound the squashed apple had made as it had landed on Uncle Binny's neck. The

episode had ceased to seem humorous. He had every reason to believe that Uncle could skin a boy if he felt so inclined ; so he made through the woods for Mickey's house on the outskirts of the town with undiminished speed.

When in sight of the kitchen door he whistled softly—" phll-u phll-u " a couple of times, and was quickly rewarded by the appearance of a sun-browned, roughly-clad youngster, perhaps fourteen, who, as soon as he saw Tuck's injured shirt and suspender, realized that something was wrong. He signaled Tuck to hide behind the barn, and then began, boylike, to manœuvre in that direction so as not to excite suspicion from his lady mother in the kitchen. Seizing the bucket he started for the well ; but on arriving there suddenly made the astonishing discovery that one of the boards needed nailing. He volunteered the in-

formation to his mother, and dashed into the barn for nails—and a closer view of friend Tuck, who it was plain to see, was in an unusually bad fix of some kind.

"Cheese it, Tuck; me mother'll get you spotted. What's up?" he whispered breathlessly.

"Say, Mickey, the old man's after me; he'll skin me this time sure. I want my shoes and stockings and my coat," came in an answering whisper.

"Go an' get 'em, then."

"Not on your life;—you go an' get 'em for me. Then I'll spend the night with you, and we'll go to school together to-morrow."

"We will not—we will not, Tucker Dan. You get your own clothes and we will play hookey to-morrow."

Tucker had failed to work the astute Mickey as easily as he had thought; but he tried another scheme.

"Mickey Connor, you come over to my place and tell Nunc Binny that you think I was hurted on the road in an accident,—tell him it looked like me. Then when they're gone after me I'll hook my own clothes."

Mickey grinned, and grabbing a handful of nails and a hammer, walked to the well with friend Tucker. Together they nailed down all the boards that needed nailing, and about a dozen that didn't need anything whatever; and then Mickey boldly told his mother that Tuck was going to stay over night with him, but that they were first going back to get Tuck's shoes.

Mrs. Connor raised no objection. Had not the pair nailed down the well boards for her—a thing long needed? Besides, the Binnys were more prosperous than the Connors. If Mrs. Connor wondered when she saw Tuck's ruptured suspender

and torn shirt she said nothing about them.

The two schemers started back towards Uncle Binny's, whistling a chorus. Mickey spoke first.

"Tuck, when you want to work anybody, just be good to 'em."

"Yep; but there ain't any loose well boards around our place," answered Tucker Dan as he swaggered along chewing a piece of grass; "Aunt Amy ain't so easy."

"Maybe she ain't easy; but you always wanter sit down an' think how to get along without making a fuss, Tuck."

"Sure; but when Nunc Binny gets through with me this time I'll have to do my thinking standing up," said Tucker reflectively.

Mickey chortled; and the two started on an easy dog-trot through the woods, discussing how best to get possession of

the missing and necessary articles of apparel.

It was dark when they arrived in view of the Binny homestead; but through the distant windows they could see the supper waiting. Aunt Amy was uneasily pacing up and down, and now and then gesticulating towards Uncle Binny.

"They're worried," exclaimed Mickey.

"Yep; and Nunc Binny's getting the deuce, but if I was such a fool as to go in now they'd set on me together. Start the ball rolling, Mickey."

"All right; but if I get caught and licked I'll take it out of you, Tucker Dan."

"Sure," was the grinning answer; "and if you get caught and licked, you and Nunc Binny can start a search for me."

A period of a minute or so elapsed in silence as Mickey screwed up his courage to "start the ball rolling." Tucker mean-

while disappeared by a circuitous route to another side of the house.

Suddenly Mickey began to jump up and down, and throw dirt upon himself in the dark. "I got to look like I've been running to beat the band," he exclaimed to himself. Then starting pell-mell for the distant house, leaping the brook and wetting his clothes purposely, he rushed up to the kitchen door, and slammed it behind him as he staggered across to the dining-room. There he leaned against the wall and gurgled an unintelligible something at Mr. Binny.

He looked as though he had run a mile over all kinds of obstructions, and the Binnys knew in a moment that something dreadful had happened. They seized him, set him on a chair and fanned him, and Aunt Amy offered him a drink.

He took the tumbler and purposely

drank the liquid slowly. As he had said, he did his best thinking when he was sitting down.

"What's the matter, Connor? What's —what's—has anything happened to Tucker?" exclaimed the Binnys in chorus.

"He's—he's—oh gosh, he's outside there on the road.—Automobile," gasped Mickey.

"An accident!" shrieked Aunt Amy.

"Did you say an automobile accident?" queried Uncle Binny, knowing full well that no automobile could go on the road near by.

Mickey felt his mistake and sat down harder. "No," he cried. "Run down by wagon—boy looks like Tuck; they picked him up an' carried him to the corners, an' an automobile took him to town an' to de hospital."

Poor Uncle Binny and Aunt Amy

grabbed their hats, and Mickey led the way across lots to the woods. Uncle Binny had dropped all his suspicions, for he saw as he left the house that Mickey was crying.

"Maybe he'll have to have a leg took off;—it was awful like Tuck; when I seen him look so dreadful I just took a fly over here," exclaimed the guide as he led the distracted uncle and aunt deeper into the woods. "I'll run ahead," he continued; "just turn to the right—that's the corners. I want to see Tuck."

Mickey bounded ahead, disappeared from view and then doubled on his tracks back to the Binny home; while the two nearest relatives of Tucker Dan took a passing carriage and were driven to the hospital.

Meanwhile Tuck clad himself properly at home, and then went out into the night to join Mickey; but before he left he

placed a new huckleberry-pie from the shelf in Uncle Binny's chair at the table. This chair was an upholstered affair which had recently been presented to its owner by the members of his lodge, in recognition of the high esteem in which they held his teachings. Uncle Binny loved that chair, and Tucker hated it.

Later when the Binnys returned they came in silence, and in silence Aunt Amy took her seat at table. Uncle Binny paced the floor calmly and reflectively. Finally the lady broke the quietude.

"George Binny—to think that we've been faked by that young Connor scamp. Aren't you ashamed when you think how you blubbered at the hospital when you asked for Tucker?"

The old man looked angrily at his wife; then he sat down in his nice upholstered chair and drew himself towards the table.

"Let us eat, Amy; at all events the boy's probably alive. It beats the Dutch how glad I am to sit in this soft chair again; it's the comfortablest chair I ever sat in. It seems especially soft to-night." Then he stretched and sorrowfully remarked—"But where *has* Tucker Dan been? where is he now, I wonder?"

He hesitated as a curious and clammy sensation stealthily overcame him. Next moment he war-whooped, and Aunt Amy stood up with him. She gave one gasp as she pointed to the clinging huckle berries.

"Thank heaven, the boy's safe, anyway, Binny," she cried hysterically. "Read your answer: Tucker Dan has been *here*."

Two boys watching results from a distance disappeared by the milky light of the moon.

Said Tucker to Mickey as they went to bed that night in the latter's bed,

"Just call me if Nunc Binny comes. I got to be a man, and take my licking."

"Sure;—you'll get it," said Mickey; "an' if you get blistered use molasses an' cream; dat's wot I used last time."

CHAPTER TWO

UNCLE BINNY TAKES A SWIM

NCLE Binny didn't lie awake that night wondering where the absent boy was, for he knew full well that he was stopping with his friend Mickey. Instead he slept the sleep of an honest but injured man. Once he awoke and thought of the upholstered chair; and then he made up his mind that he would square the account in an unexpected manner. He would catch the boys the next day on the beach, a mile across the harbor, where he was sure they would go to play hookey and have a clambake. *He* had been a boy forty-five years ago, and it was just the thing then as it was

now to skip school, sail across the bay to the beach, and there hunt for clams and bake them in fresh seaweed thrown over a fire made in a hole in the sand. Uncle Binny was close mouthed, and after breakfast started off on his errand, armed with a good serviceable whip under his coat and a lunch prepared by Aunt Amy, who divined the truth but said never a word. There was quiet balminess in the air, the birds chirped and the cows gazed reflectively at him as he cut across the farm towards town ; but there was danger in Uncle Binny this time.

When the green upholstered chair had turned to huckleberry purple, other things had also changed. No longer would Tucker Dan be dealt leniently with. No longer would Aunt Amy have anything to do in spoiling the discipline of his ward. No, he, Uncle Binny, would catch Tucker ; and then Tucker would

catch something worse than a cold. Thus mused Mr. Binny as he wandered through town to the head of the beach, where it swung round and joined the mainland. He would stalk the quarry from the unexpected quarter. He would hide in the scrub that grew on the harbor side of the beach and catch the boys as they came from the ocean side, and their dips in the briny deep which he felt sure they would take.

Uncle Binny created a great sensation as he passed the post-office in his Sunday trousers and his workaday coat, a combination made necessary by the thoughtless sitting on the huckleberries. Some of the old boys of fifty or thereabouts poked fun at him behind his back, for old boys are similar to young ones, and Binny was known far and wide and well.

But the sensation that Mr. George

Binny made when he went, wasn't a circumstance to the sensation that he was to make that night upon his return: but nobody can look ahead very far, and he was no exception. He thought he was going to get the better of Tucker Dan—but we shall see.

Meanwhile the boys went towards school, leaving Mrs. Connor well satisfied with the friendship that caused her boy to associate with Tucker Dan; for he was better off than the average village boy—being really a Binny to all intents and purposes.

In half an hour the two were in an old boat and rowing across the harbor towards the beach.

"Hully gee!—your Uncle Binny must 'a' been kinder discouraged, Tuck; he never came after you," exclaimed Mickey as he strained at an oar.

"That means nothing—'cept he don't

want to wear his Sunday pants. He's waiting round ——"

"He—he—haw ——" chuckled Mickey as he caught a crab, and fell backwards into the bottom of the boat.

"Shucks! I thought you could row," remarked Tucker. "There ain't any use flipflapping in the bottom of this boat when you can row."

"Quit yer kiddin'; I makes mistakes just like any other feller. You never caught a crab, did you?"

"Naw," exclaimed the other disdainfully, and in such a superior manner that his friend vowed secret vengeance.

As they neared the beach Mickey, being in the bow, ordered Tucker to pull hard while he used an oar to guide the boat ashore. Tuck bent well forward and took a mighty heave; and Mickey, by a deft movement of his own oar, lifted one of the rowers' oars just as he started to

pull. Tucker Dan took a beautiful crab —landed on the forward seat on the back of his left ear, carromed across the bottom of the boat, and doubled up between the seats like a poorly stuffed pillow.

"Jiminy," exclaimed the guilty Mickey as he stood, oar in hand, and fended the bow of the boat from land—"Jiminy crickets, how de blazes did you do that? —what kinder thing do you call that?"

"Skinny Mick," exclaimed Tucker Dan as he pulled himself on to the after seat and looked his companion over carefully, "you know darn well how I did that— an' it'll cost you something."

"That what—that crab?"

"No, Skinny Mick, that wasn't a crab; that was a whale, and I'll get even."

"Whale——" Mickey chuckled so that he forgot the challenge implied in the title "Skinny Mick" which was never used towards him except as a dare.

He laughed so that Tucker began to smile too, and thus the clouds blew over as they waded to shore and beached the boat.

The sands on the ocean side were firm and the beach a mile or more in length; so, shoes and stockings in hand, they made for the extreme point near the lighthouse and began to collect clams, seaweed and sticks, and soon had the bake under way.

It was early yet, and a swim was in order before the clams would be ready. The two undressed and waded out into the sea, and sat down to let the old Atlantic roll over them. They had gone out to their shoulders and ducked once or twice when suddenly Mickey exclaimed,

"We ain't the only ones on this beach —there are other pebbles."

Tucker looked in the direction indicated and dimly saw a man wading in

for a swim, some hundreds of yards further down the beach. It was Uncle Binny who, arriving at the beach and seeing no one, had decided to take a plunge himself before the boys came, which he figured would not be for an hour yet. Tucker didn't know it was Uncle Binny, but he did know it was a good opportunity.

"Get in—get in and dress," he shouted to Mickey, and together they rushed ashore unobserved and donned their clothes behind a sand dune. "Say, Mick, how do you feel?" queried Tucker as they finished.

"Fine!—how's yerself?"

"Iligant! My back feels like a piece er sand paper;" and Tucker shook the wet sand loose under his clothes.

"My stomach feels like a balloon; let's eat clams."

"Not on your life, Mickey, not yet;

wait till we fix that lonesome jay down there."

"Sure," answered Connor; "but what do you wanter do? Must be something great the way you skun outer the salty deep."

"Get his clothes. Any jay that'll bathe on this beach without his clothes in sight needs reforming."

Mickey glanced down the beach and saw that no pile of clothes was visible.

"Jumpin' crickets," he exclaimed, "he's left them on the harbor-side,—hooray!"

"Shut up; we'll go find 'em and hide 'em; and then we'll skin back here and sit in the boat an' have a clam," said the younger but leading spirit, Tucker.

Silently they stole behind the sand-dunes on the harbor side back to where the clothes were found. Mickey kept

watch on the bather far out in the shallow water disporting himself like a water nymph.

"He's an old guy; his head is bald, but he can swim like a porpoise."

"He can—can he?" mused Tuck. "I'll bet dollars to clams that he can swear like a trooper; wait an' see when he comes out." Then Tucker grabbed all but the coat, shirt and shoes, and made for the boat.

"I'll leave him enough to go home in," he explained; "come on, Mickey, and let's hide 'em up the beach."

"Hook it; he's getting enough," volunteered Mickey; "he's airing himself on the beach now—drying off."

Stealthily they rowed up to where the clams were steaming, and eating a few, set off to hide the clothes behind a sand-dune. Suddenly Tucker Dan seized Mickey by the back of the neck.

"Look at those trousers," he whispered, "look at that vest, that watch—that—that charm."

"Hully smoke! yer Uncle Binny's!"

The two boys lay down and peered over the edge of a dune, hiding their heads behind the long beach grass.

"That's Nunc Binny, sure; that's his bald cocoanut," murmured Tucker Dan, "an' he's hopping mad, too."

By this time Uncle Binny had discovered his loss and was tearing around the beach on the double quick, with a shirt and coat in one hand and a pair of shoes in the other.

"He ain't in no hurry to dress," remarked Mickey. "Gee whittiker, Tuck, look at him take that header."

Uncle Binny had stubbed his toe on a clam shell, and was sliding along the hard beach on his naked chest.

"He's an athlete," said Tucker proudly.

"'Look at those trousers,' he whispered."—Page 38.

"He always did tell how he could do stunts when he was young."

Uncle Binny was now sitting on the beach near the water's edge holding his toe in his hands and yelling like a wild man with anger and mortification. Suddenly he bethought himself to don his shirt and coat, and his shoes.

"He's in fighting trim now," murmured Mickey uneasily, as Mr. Binny seized a piece of driftwood and started off on the double quick looking for the thieves. The wind was blowing fresh, and Uncle Binny, dressed in the shirt, coat and shoes, was making good speed against it towards the head of the beach away from the boys.

"He looks like a ship under full sail," commented Mickey as he saw the bellowing of the shirt.

"Yep, but he's top heavy; he'd better take a reef or he'll get blown over,"

was the answer.—"Gee, but can't he sail?"

The two miscreants ate clams and watched the lone searcher as he sped away down the beach against the wind. Suddenly Mr. George Binny gave up the chase in that direction and turned back. The wind was behind him now and it was easy running. Tucker Dan had a hot clam half-way down his throat when he saw that the lone runner had turned and was heading for them. Uncle Binny was nearly half a mile off and had evidently spied the slight smoke from the clambake.

"Cheese it," exclaimed Tuck as he coughed up the half-swallowed clam; "there comes the Flying Dutchman—an' the wind's with him."

Mickey gave a frightened look back and the two boys skedaddled into the boat with the clothes.

"Take 'em along," commanded Tucker Dan; "it's all we have, you know, Mickey, to prove that Uncle Binny's been drownded on the beach."

Mickey shrieked with delight at the new developments he foresaw. Together the boys rowed for the farthest landing, down the harbor and away from the village.

When Mr. Binny, stick in hand, reached the clambake the two boys were too far away to understand a word he said. Mickey remarked that it sounded like French. "He'll tan you when he gets you, Tuck."

"Sure—but the sun'll tan him first. Did you ever see such a stunt in your life, Mickey?"

"Never; say, Tucker, your Nunc Binny needs an American flag to wrap round him."

By this time Mr. George Binny was

doing a solitary two step on the top of a sand-dune, and pointing wildly at himself. Pretending not to have seen him, both boys rowed steadily for the opposite shore where they landed and thought it all over.

"We better let people think he was drownded; that'll make a fuss," said Tucker Dan.

"Sure!—but it'll be an awful lie."

"Leave that to me. You say what I tell you to say, an' it'll only be a white lie; they don't count," said Tuck as he threw a stone carelessly into a near by tree.

"All right, and when they come to find him he'll run like a deer again," and both the boys put their hands across their stomachs and doubled up in enjoyment of the picture.

"Aunt A. A. always said Nunc Binny was too bashful to get along. He'll get

along now. I can see him with the wind behind him, and the brethren from his lodge chasing him down that beach now; —can't you, Mickey?"

Mickey rolled over on the ground and kicked his heels, shouting, "Oh, gee—Tucker—Dan!"

"What'll folks say about us when they find out?"

"I dunno, an' I don't care so long as they do the right thing by Nunc Binny and help him in his hour of need."

The boys walked into the woods near by and sat down to wait and kill time; while across the harbor on the beach Uncle Binny excavated a hole in the dry sand in the lee of a dune, and waited therein for the shades of night and a chance to return home unobserved.

CHAPTER THREE

UNCLE BINNY'S RETURN HOME

ATE in the afternoon the boys returned to town at a rapid dog-trot, their favorite gait when in action. With them were Uncle Binny's clothes and two or three neighborly dogs that followed them partly from inquisitiveness, and partly because all the dogs knew the pair and enjoyed their company. When near the main street Mickey and Tucker dove into a jewelry store kept by one of Uncle Binny's best friends and threw the clothes breathlessly on the floor.

"We played hookey, an' was on the beach. We seen a man in the ocean, an' then we didn't see no man in the ocean,

but we found his clothes—some of 'em—an' they are Nuncle Binny's." This was the literal truth. They deemed it unnecessary to state that when they didn't see the man in the ocean they saw him on land. Such a statement was quite uncalled for. Tucker Dan had figured that if people jumped too soon at conclusions it was their own fault.

The jeweler looked at the clothes and charm. "Your Uncle Binny's—sure," he exclaimed. "What was he doing down there on the beach?"

"After us, I guess;—wanted to catch me;—took a swim 'cause we wasn't to be found, an' now—— Oh, golly, poor Nunc Binny——" exclaimed Tucker Dan breaking into what sounded like a sob.

Mr. Orth gazed at the boys. "You saw him in the water—and then you didn't see him in the water," he exclaimed, his face turning pale.

"Yes; that's it—that's it; then we found his clothes."

"Drowned." Mr. Orth reverently took the clothes behind the counter. "Drowned," he exclaimed hurriedly, and next minute, speaking to his clerk, he dashed out for the police station down the street. Tucker nudged Mickey. "It ain't a lie; see how it works. We did see him in the ocean, and then we didn't see him in the ocean."

It wasn't necessary for the boys to do any more talking. Mr. Orth had a crowd around him in about one minute, and in a short time a large search party had formed.

The stores were closed in town and the party headed for the beach afoot, carrying grappling irons and ropes, while several light skiffs were put into wagons to be carted to the beach and there launched into the Atlantic. Others started to

row across the harbor for the same purpose.

The two boys were forgotten, and hurrying back to the outskirts of town they waited anxiously at the place where they had landed from the beach and where their boat lay on the shore. Both were uneasy and getting more so every minute. The magnitude of their work began to awe them.

"Gee, Tuck, look at the crowd going down the head of the beach. Your Uncle Binny's going to have a big funeral, don't you think?" exclaimed Mickey doubtfully.

"The funeral may be ours," answered Tucker softly as they watched the exodus in the growing twilight. "Nunc Binny will be swooped in pretty soon," he continued.

"Bet he don't stay on the beach; bet you he makes a break;—he ain't agoin'

to be caught dressed like a pirate. He never would outgrow it."

"Cheese it, Mick, look——! For the land's sake, there comes Nunc Binny now."

Sure enough! They could see him rise from his sand-dune, run along the water's edge and roll a log into the harbor; next moment he was hanging on to the log and kicking for the mainland in the direction of the boys. He had escaped detection by the searchers as he was too far down the beach to be seen. Slowly he swam in towards the mainland aided by the current, and the boys watched him anxiously.

He was evidently tired, but being a good swimmer he had managed to bestride the log and was taking things easy in the twilight. He had buttoned his coat, and his shirt was still on, so that as he grabbed the log with his hands and

his legs he created a striking appearance.

"It must be one of those sea-urchins we read about t'other day at school," exclaimed Mickey with a grin.

"Nope—must be a sea-horse," chuckled Tucker.

"Haw—haw, Tuck. Say, cheese it; I can't laugh at your Nunc Binny. It's too sad. Look—what's up?"

Mr. George Binny had been discovered by the searchers, and crowds of them lined the harbor edge of the beach, cheering him on in his long swim. They all thought he had drifted and swum into the harbor on the log from the Atlantic outside; but still they couldn't understand how he happened to get aboard of a log at sea in a half dressed condition. Uncle Binny had no idea of letting them find out; and when he saw he was discovered and that some boats were after him he

rolled off the log and swam desperately for shore. Those watching afar off cheered at his superb exhibition of physical prowess. As he was nearing the mainland Tucker Dan spoke.

"Mickey, let's get near home;—he's got to get home."

The boys were off as night closed in, and Uncle Binny made a landing some distance down the shore. Tuck and his chum soon reached the Binny house, found a good point of vantage behind the back fence and waited.

The moon was nearly full now, and cast shadows here and there which afforded good hiding spots for the pair. They could see that Aunt Amy was within the dining-room talking to Mrs. Connor, who was evidently paying her a late call.

"They're consultin'," exclaimed Tucker. "They think you an' I are run

away; an' Nunc Binny's too late coming home for comfort."

"Nobody ain't told 'em he was drownded," said Mickey. "If they had they'd be cryin'."

"Sure; but listen!"

The drone of the two ladies' voices came wafted to the ears without. Aunt Amy was speaking.

"No, Mrs. Connor, I never spanked Tucker Dan Pils but once, but when he comes home I'll do it again even if Binny has caught him and done it already."

"Laws-a-mercy," answered Mrs. Connor. "I ain't a goin' to spank Mickey, but his father has just made a nice new whip with four tails to it to-day; an' he 'lows as how Mickey'll be laid up for repairs until next fall."

Mickey stood on one leg behind the fence and listened attentively, while Tucker Dan shuddered and felt cold

chills running down his back at the cold-bloodedness of Aunt Amy.

Suddenly he grabbed Mickey by his shoulders and pulled him down to a large hole in the fence through which both could peer at once.

"Look over there near the barn, Mick. There's Nunc Binny."

He surely was there, standing half in the moonlight and half in the shadow, with his bald head shining like a search-light, his white shirt hanging to his knees and his dark coat buttoned around his manly breast. His shoes looked twice too large for him when contrasted with the tanned skin above. He was undecided as to how to storm the house evidently, but soon ran along the barn and stealthily started to climb the board fence of the yard.

The two ladies within the house heard a noise, and Aunt Amy cast a glance

towards the back fence. It was Tucker's favorite way of approach, and when she saw a bare leg with a shoe on it half-way over the fence she decided that Tucker Dan had come at last. She just raised her eyes to Mrs. Connor and said, "Sh—keep quiet; there comes Tucker over the fence. He'll sneak up the back way, and I'll whale him as he goes up-stairs."

All was quiet; so Uncle Binny raised himself cautiously over the fence and made for the back door. Mickey whispered to Tucker that it was a blamed shame to see a man like him so afraid of his own shadow, and the other scapegrace drily answered that judging from the shape of the shadow it wasn't to be wondered at.

Uncle Binny opened the kitchen door very softly and started to steal up-stairs. Aunt Amy was waiting behind the hall

door for dear Tucker as she thought, and as Mr. Binny took the first step upward she landed with a large flat piece of pine board.

Mr. Binny went up the stairs four at a time, and dropped in bed with a whoop that made Tucker Dan and Mickey sick with excitement.

Mrs. Connor when she saw the figure of Uncle Binny bounding up-stairs four at a time flew out of the back door cackling like a scared hen; while Aunt Amy, discovering her mistake, collapsed on the kitchen floor and screamed to Uncle Binny to come down and explain.

A portentous silence reigned behind the back fence, broken by a whisper from Tucker.

"Say, Mick, we've gone a bit too far this time. I'm going in to take my medicine."

"Yep, I'm goin' home to get a lickin',

"The scene that ensued was the liveliest of the day."—Page 55.

too," assented Mick. "Dis here thing is dreadful."

But they didn't move quickly enough. Uncle Binny had encased himself in a blue and red counterpane, and peering out of the window saw the two lads behind the back fence. Seizing a bed slat, with the agility of a cat he climbed out on to the wood-shed, and next moment jumped down between the two as they unsuspectingly gazed through the fence.

The scene that ensued was active enough even for Tucker Dan. It was the liveliest of the day.

CHAPTER FOUR

UNCLE BINNY LOSES CASTE

BOUT a half mile to the south of the Binny homestead was that of Orlando Martin, a rather prosperous merchant in the town of Sorrento, where the doings herein chronicled took place. Mr. Martin had two daughters, Augusta and Salvina—twins; but why he had called one Salvina nobody ever knew. Some in Sorrento said it was because Mr. Martin was weak-minded from the shock at the time, and insisted on having his own way, despite his wife's desire to call the baby "Welcome." At all events the girls grew up to be as pretty and captivating as any one could desire, and they

were most astonishingly alike even for twins.

At the time of the opening of our story the girls were just about thirteen, and scholars at the same school that Tucker Dan and his friend Michael Connor attended. Although the little maidens were bowing acquaintances of the two boys, they never allowed Tucker and his chum to break over the line of distant formality; and in all fairness it must be said that neither of the boys had tried to force his attentions. Except once a few months back when Mickey had surreptitiously put a small live lobster on Augusta's back hair as she flew up-stairs to the class-room; but this friendly advance had worked out in an unexpected manner. Nobody knew who put the crustacean there. The class simply discovered it when Augusta stood up to recite, and then as the lobster swung its

right arm and hooked a short blow on her neck she discovered it too. The teacher, not knowing what caused the riot, seized the twin by the shoulder. The lobster used its empty left hand this time and hooked successfully on to the teacher's thumb; and the lady and Augusta, united by a common bond, waltzed down-stairs and out into the playground, where they did a skirt dance. Some one, hearing them, thought there was a fire in the school and turned in an alarm, and the engines arrived just as the lobster let go its grip. Mickey was so scared by the dénouement that he went home and hid in the barn, where he contracted pneumonia from which he nearly lost his life. An investigation made at the school pointed to Tucker Dan as the guilty party, he being the acknowledged schemer; and he was duly disciplined. Mickey confessed to Tucker

on what he thought was his death-bed, and Tuck forgave him. The boys were ever after stancher friends than before, and as Tucker never told, Mickey looked upon him as a hero of great proportions.

The Martin homestead was surrounded by a splendid lawn, bordered by rose-bushes which were in full bloom, and commanding a view of the fields in the distance and of the Binny home to the north near the woods.

On the moonlight evening when Uncle Binny returned from his ride on the log in the harbor and was mistaken by Aunt Amy for Tucker Dan, the twin sisters, who were just about to retire, were gazing out of their window on the landscape so brilliantly illuminated by the orb of night, and holding childish and sisterly confidences, for they loved each other dearly. They were young yet.

"Salvina," began Augusta—"Salvina,

I think you're in love with Tucker Dan Pils;—tee—hee—hee," she chuckled in thirteen-year-old glee at her boldness.

Salvina looked her sister over very carefully in the moonlight and elevating her clear cut and aristocratic little nose remarked,

"Tucker always was nice to me, an' mother says he's much nicer than he looks. His Uncle Binny is a nice man, and Tuck comes from a good enough family—so if he likes me and I like him there's nothing to prevent our liking each other."

"Nothing but his grammar and his getting into scrapes and sticking the lobster on my back hair," answered the more critical Augusta.

"Well, your back hair don't count; besides I don't think Tucker did it. I think Mickey Connor was the one that did it, and Tuck got what he oughtn't to

got. Besides you haven't anything to say: if you'd only seen yourself dancing rag-time with the teacher and the lobster you'd never say another word regarding anybody's love affairs," retorted Salvina, now thoroughly aroused.

"Well, you can have Tucker Dan if you want him, but he wouldn't look at you through a smoked glass.—No, he wouldn't," and Augusta straightened up ready to defend herself from a possible onslaught.

"Maybe I'm in love, an' maybe I ain't," returned the smarting Salvina; "but anyway I'll be true to him and to myself, an' I want you to understand that Tucker Dan Pils *does* look at me, and he doesn't use a smoked glass either; and if he looked at *you* even through a smoked glass it wouldn't do any good: you'd break it into a hundred thousand billion pieces."

There was a silence, long drawn and tense; then Augusta burst into tears. "You're mean, you're as mean as you can be."

Salvina put her arms around her sister's neck and drew her towards her. "Not so mean as you think, Augusta. I haven't told mama that you sent that rose to Mickey Connor when he was getting over the pneumonia; and I never teased you when I thought you really cared for Mickey although you make fun of him so."

Augusta swallowed a tear of surprise and acknowledged her guilt, and together the two girls again faced the window and the moonlight, and in silence communed with the spirits of the two distant loved ones.

It just so happened that at this exact moment Uncle Binny dropped from the roof of the wood-shed, bed slat in hand,

upon the two unsuspecting loved ones behind the fence. Tucker and Mickey thought an insane wildcat was loose, until the slat began to fly; then they realized that the apparition in red and blue was Uncle Binny looking for exercise, and together they decided to stretch their legs southward. They had yelled a few times, and the two girls in the Martin home broke their silence at the window. Augusta spoke first.

"Goodness,—what was that?"

"Sounded like a cat fight over near Mr. Binny's."

"Yes, but did you hear that funny sound?—somebody's beating carpets."

"Funny time to beat carpets,—by night," exclaimed Salvina, and the two listened again in amazement.

Just then Tucker let out his parting shriek, and Mickey cleared a couple of yards in the air and bellowed a reverber-

ating howl that made the twins tremble with fright.

"It's a human voice," exclaimed Salvina. "It's awful,—it's a murder—no, it's a fight;—no, it's Mickey Connor's voice. I'd know it anywhere."

By this time the rest of the Martin family down-stairs were out on the porch, and the two girls were three-quarters out of the window in the effort to make out what it was that was after the boys. Tucker Dan and Mickey sailed in full flight under the window, and dashed away and beyond, totally oblivious that the twins had seen them. Uncle Binny, suddenly realizing that he was being watched, halted in the distance and waved his bed slat, folding the variegated bed quilt carefully around him. He looked like an Indian; and Tucker Dan, glancing behind him as he ran, quickly realized it. As he dashed past

the Martin coachman at the barn entrance he yelled, "He's an Indian,—drive him off; he's crazy."

It happened that there was a gipsy encampment thereabouts, and Mr. Martin and his man lost no time in arming themselves. The coachman, a new man, got a pitchfork and Mr. Martin a revolver; and together they made for what they supposed was an Indian on the rampage.

Uncle Binny had an awful time ahead of him.

The coachman was fleet of foot. As Mr. Martin fired his revolver in the air and Mr. Binny sprinted for the sake of his reputation, the man with the pitchfork overtook the fleeing gentleman, and prodded him until he dropped his quilt and cleared the back fence of his house for the second time that night.

Unfortunately at that instant a dele-

gation from the lodge and several hundred of the townspeople were assembled in front of the house to see how Mr. Binny had survived his swim on the log, and to congratulate him on his safety. When they saw Uncle Binny coming over the back fence in the same deshabille as when he bestrode the log, and with Mr. Martin's coachman close behind him, they decided to go home without asking questions of a lunatic.

It was an awful shock. The crowd simply couldn't stand it.

CHAPTER FIVE

THE DOCTOR INTERVIEWS MICKEY

N the desperate race from Uncle Binny's vengeance Tucker Dan had escaped unscathed, but Mickey wasn't so fortunate. As he followed his friend around the Martin barn he stumbled, slightly spraining his ankle, and not being in a particularly good humor he yelled until the chickens in the hen-house near by started a discordant chorus.

These very yells lent speed to the coachman and to Mr. Martin in their wild chase after the Indian, for they felt certain that the aborigine had mauled the boy. Mrs. Martin in her sympathy ran out with the maid and helped Connor up

and told him she was sorry; and together these two led him into the dining-room and gently laid him on a couch. Then they bathed and stroked and pulled his leg until Mickey felt he was in a place too good to be real. He accepted a drink of claret and controlled himself as became a wounded gentleman. Tucker Dan came in cautiously, and quickly understood that Mickey was nine-tenths shamming; but seeing a good opportunity of improving acquaintance with the twins—who had hurriedly dressed and were standing in pained alarm on the staircase—he subtly suggested something about Mickey having once broken that very ankle, and did they suppose a doctor was necessary?

It was a good play. Mrs. Martin 'phoned immediately for the nearest surgeon. Although the Connors and she didn't belong to the same social

set exactly, Mrs. Martin was no stickler for such matters when a boy was almost dead with an injury that might cripple him for years if not for life. So they took him up-stairs and laid him on a bed.

Augusta hovered about the room door in great anxiety, and Salvina out in the hall listened to Tucker's account of just how it happened. He hadn't the vaguest idea of how it had happened, but that made no difference. He held his end up wonderfully well, and Mickey, who overheard the account, decided that his friend needed no help.

Mrs. Connor and the maid left the room for a moment, and Augusta slipped in, and stealing softly up to the couch, looked sorrowfully at the injured one. Mickey saw her expression and made his own very pained and disconsolate.

The heart of the pretty little maid,

already badly touched, completely gave way, and putting her hand upon Mickey's manly brow she whispered softly, "I'm awfully sorry Mr.—Mr.——"

"Make it plain Mickey," exclaimed the invalid with a tender grin; "the plainer the better."

"Mickey," half sobbed Augusta, "it must be awful."

"It is," murmured Mickey — "it's the awfullest sufferin' man ever endured."

Augusta cast a last look of tenderness at him and tiptoed out of the room before her mother returned. As Augusta stole out Tucker Dan stole in and stood by the couch of suffering.

"You darn faker, you——" he whispered wrathfully.

"It *does* hurt," answered Mickey. "Anyway I got to back you up, ain't I?"

"Well," drawled Tucker; "here comes your finish;" and Mickey squirmed as

he heard the heavy tread of the surgeon who was just then admitted to the front hall.

Dr. Nash was the most popular member of the profession for miles around, and a surgeon of considerable ability. What he knew he knew well, and what he didn't know didn't worry him. The consequence was that he got along famously, considering that he weighed three hundred and twenty-two pounds, and that when he operated he couldn't always see his fingers, owing to a marvelous corporosity. He had dainty hands and always kept them immaculately clean, and wore the best clothes that he could buy, regardless of cost. Besides these attributes he had a handsome face, and an over-developed sense of humor. If he was about to perform a very serious operation he always preceded it with a few stories, because, as he said, he rarely

felt so happy afterwards and the patients never did.

When the doctor entered the room poor Mickey nearly had a fit. He had never seen him so close before, and the room seemed all doctor and no Mickey.

Dr. Nash sat down on the strongest chair he could find and glanced searchingly at the patient. His experienced eye told him the boy was not really suffering much, so he began his interview in the way best suited to disprove Mickey's story.

"Hurt much, my boy?"

"Yessir."

"Where?"

"Ankle."

By this time the dexterous fingers of the surgeon were sliding over the bones in a fatherly sort of a way. The boy squealed once or twice, making the women folk gasp in sympathy.

"That certainly is a terribly painful injury, my boy," exclaimed the doctor as he gazed long and searchingly at Mickey in a way that gave the horrors to the culprit.

Tucker Dan, standing at the foot of the couch, understood. "He's on—he's on to Mickey. Mickey, you're up against it," he thought.

Dr. Nash got up slowly and ponderously, and nodding to Mrs. Martin led the way to the parlor, saying as he disappeared, "Let's talk this over, Mrs. Martin; it is a serious injury."

Tucker Dan never smiled, and Mickey couldn't have smiled if he had had to. He had begun to feel nervous. There was Augusta to whom he must enact the part of a hero, and there was the doctor ready for business.

He eyed Tucker Dan; but his chum shook his head sorrowfully.

"Doc thinks it is pretty bad. Did you see how he shook his head? That means yer foot's broke."

Just then Dr. Nash's voice came wafted in from the parlor to Mickey.

"Have you a good table you can let me have, Mrs. Martin?—one that will hold the boy if he struggles, you know. Ether makes them awful sick."

Mickey didn't suspect that Dr. Nash had told Mrs. Martin in a whisper that the injured boy was largely fooling them; nor did he know that Mrs. Martin had entered into the spirit of the doctor's humor.

"Well, doctor, we have the kitchen table, and Mr. Martin and the coachman will soon be back; they can hold him no matter how he cuts up. What are you going to do?"

"Well, the boy needs to have considerable setting done; and, by the way, my

saw is rusty ;—have you one of those long bread knives with ragged edges? They make elegant bone saws. We'll sterilize it and it will do. Nothing like knowing how to get along in an emergency."

Dr. Nash had so controlled his voice that it came very indistinctly to Mickey.

"We'll telephone for another doctor, and finish this job right now ; and then to-morrow the boy can go to the hospital. His father ought to stand fifty dollars for my services,—don't you think so, Mrs. Martin ? "

"Surely."

"Fifty dollars," murmured Mickey ; "did you hear that, Tuck ? "

"Sure, but it's got to be done."

"Fifty dollars ! that means fifty inches of skin off my back when the old man gets the bill," murmured Mickey ;—"an' ether, an' a sterilized bread knife —— Oh, Lord ! "

The cold perspiration was trickling down Mickey's back. Cautiously he moved his foot; it worked all right. Then he measured with his eye the distance to the nearest window and rose from his couch, seizing his stocking and his shoe.

Dr. Nash was coming, and remarking to Mrs. Martin as he came, "I'll break the news to the boy now. It must be."

"You'll break nothing of the sort," yelled Mickey as he sprang over the table and gracefully mounted the window sill. He made a grab for the rain pipe outside, and swung on to it like a monkey. Whooping with fright he slid down, and in a flash struck something soft and wet at the bottom. Then those above heard an appalling sound like a whale spouting; and Tucker yelled, "Gosh! Mick's in the rain barrel."

All hands flew to the rescue; but all

they saw was a lone figure, wet to the skin, loping, shoe in hand across the moonlit field.

"Where's that Tucker Dan?" asked the doctor suddenly.

Then the gentle moonlight revealed another figure, sprinting in the track of the first.

CHAPTER SIX

UNCLE BINNY'S MISTAKE

NCLE BINNY'S popularity suffered a great shock when it became known that he was not insane. Had he been a sufferer from mental trouble his fellow citizens would have been sorry; but as it was, they felt that such conduct in a citizen and a church member was unbecoming to say the least. When they thought of how they had organized search parties and scoured the beach, and afterwards gone to congratulate Mr. Binny on his safe arrival home, only to witness him hurdling over the back fence in the full enjoyment of his health, they felt aggrieved.

Strangely no one blamed Tucker Dan for thinking his uncle had been drowned; and nobody on the other hand could forgive Mr. Binny for letting his wife spank him. Every one blamed him for chasing Tucker Dan Pils and Mickey Connor across country, and then being such a coward as to run away from Mr. Martin and his coachman. This argued that if Mr. Binny couldn't control his temper and his courage better than that he was a mighty poor specimen of a house owner.

Mr. Binny endeavored to explain once or twice; but he never got very far before he realized that he was on a wave of unpopularity, and quit in disgust. When he finally got hold of Tucker he actually didn't dare whip him, so cowed was he by public opinion; and even Aunt Amy never said a word to the boy, out of sheer mortification at herself and the most un-

usual and unheard of cuttings up of her hitherto esteemed spouse.

All the recent adventures preyed on Mr. Binny's mind, and he formed the habit of taking long walks into the country alone. Now as a matter-of-fact, he was as nice an old gentleman as one could find in a day's journey ; but he was discouraged and the blues had him, and he must needs walk them off or burst.

The more he worried, the more he decided to fix Tucker Dan at the first opportunity. Uncle Binny was losing hope and temper, and it rankled him to see the wan smile on his wife's face whenever he went up the back stairs in a sprightly manner.

Tucker was quietly studying his uncle all this while, and he didn't like the symptoms. One morning Mickey met him on the way to school and started in with the query,

" What ails yer Nuncle Binny ? "

"Uncle's got the thinks."

"That must be it. I seen him out in the woods t'other day with a hatchet cutting out a handle on a board. The board was looking something like a pocket sized brickbat. When he got through, I seen him stick it in his hip pocket."

Tucker thought pensively for a moment.

"Mick," he said finally, "that small sized bat was made for yours truly."

"Gosh, Tuck, ain't you had yer lickin' yet?"

"Nope; but there are signs in the sky, dear Michael."

"I'm sorry," exclaimed Mickey; "I'm sorry, Tuck. You see I'm well over mine; I'm convalescing."

"Yep," said Tucker Dan bravely; "but when Uncle Binny breaks loose he'll be a cyclone. He ain't blowed off good an' hard since I've known him."

"Gee; them's the worst kind. You better see Dr. Nash and get something before it begins.—Anyway I'll tell Salvina to send you flowers when it happens." Mickey dodged behind a tree in time to miss the apple which Tucker fired at him. The latter, thoroughly angry at such remarks, chased Mickey into the basement of the schoolroom and sat on his chest as soon as he could.

"Mick," said he, "never drag a lady's name into any such a thing as that. If you do I'll punch you."

Mickey squirmed on the floor and suddenly arched his back. Tuck lost his balance and fell headlong into the ash bin near by. He was up in a second, looking like a fricasseed oyster, and blind with dust and ashes started headlong after Mickey up the stairs, forgetting that the school bell had rung a moment before. Mickey disappeared somewhere,

and Tucker landed with a bound in front of the teacher, a little man with a kindly face and named O'Hara, who threw up his arm in self-defense at sight of the ash-covered intruder. Tucker Dan thought it was Mickey continuing the fight, and in his blinded condition swung low and caught the pedagogue on the jaw as he ducked to save himself.

Mr. O'Hara fell forward on his knees, butted his head against the floor and went to sleep. It was a dreadful mistake.

In about a second Tucker had shaken the ashes out of his eyes; and when he saw what he had done he made for the woods. He did not wait to call back to his schoolmates who seemed to have suddenly organized a gigantic chorus. Neither did he run any faster when he heard Mickey shouting at the top of his voice, "Run, Tucker,—run like Hali-

fax." He didn't run faster because he couldn't. He heard his hip joints creak as he flew along, and he knew they needed oil, but it was too late to argue that matter. The wind blew the ashes behind him, and pedestrians stopped in amazement to see the curious color of his hair. They started in pursuit when the true nature of the thing was explained to them by the lady teacher who rushed frantically to the street.

Tucker Dan glanced behind him and saw the crowd growing, and heard the patter of the pursuing feet. "Gosh, I'm a pill this time sure!" said he fervently.

He was naturally very fleet of foot, and had always prided himself that he could outrun any fellow in town except Mickey; but he was now conscious that some one was not far behind him. Some one who ran lightly with an easy stride like his own, and who seemed to be gaining.

Tuck did not dare to look back lest he should lose speed, and he couldn't let out any more reefs, so he gritted his teeth and worked his legs like pistons—and thought. He was in sight of the woods, but although he was gaining on the crowd he couldn't shake off the runner behind him. He could hear the ominous growls from the distant pursuers, and he knew what it meant—but he couldn't hear anything from the fellow behind him except his lightly falling feet.

"That fellow's got Tucker Dan Pils this time," he thought. "My jig's up; he's a wonder."

Closer came the footfalls behind, and it was evident Tucker could not get away. His heart sank within him, but suddenly the pursuer spoke, and the culprit revived.

"Run," cried the voice, "run like the devil.—I'm wid you."

"Mickey," exclaimed Tucker in a joyous gasp.

"Yes, it's Mick—but don't stop. Remember I'm trying to catch you. Ye're a murderer, Tuck—he's dead as a clam."

That was enough for Tucker Dan. He let out the last ounce of strength and dashed into the woods, where Mickey overhauled him; and together they ran a short distance and sat down behind a fallen tree.

"How did you do it, Tuck?" queried Mickey in deepest sympathy.

"I thought he was you, and I let go at him. Is he sure enough dead?"

"He's stiff as a board, Tuck; you better go home before the crowd comes."

Tucker Dan stood up, and looking at Mickey said—his voice trembling with emotion, "Mick, you an' I have been friends; will we always be friends?"

"Always, Tuck; an' when dey hangs you it'll break me all up."

"Yep, me, too," murmured Tucker; "and—oh, say, Mick, I can't stand it." Then he led the way through the woods and across the field homeward.

"I might as well tell Uncle Binny," he continued bravely. "I didn't mean to do it, but it's done and we'll never go out together any more, Mick."

Both boys were feeling pretty blue by this time. The magnitude of the catastrophe had come to both of them in its full seriousness, and naturally Tucker wanted the love and protection of Uncle Binny. It was an awful position for the boy, and he turned where nature prompted him.

Uncle Binny was sitting on the door-steps admiring the hen-house when Tucker hove in sight, with Mickey some way behind; for Mickey couldn't stand

the horror of it, and had let Tucker Dan advance alone.

"Uncle Binny, I've done an awful thing. I didn't mean to. I'm a mu-mud——" poor Tucker Dan couldn't say any more; he was utterly overcome.

Uncle Binny needed no further enlightenment; this was his long-waited for opportunity. He saw the boy's clothes ground with ashes, and his hatless head covered with the same product; and he knew by the culprit's general appearance that he *had* done something dreadful this time.

"Ah—ha!" quoth Uncle Binney as he stood up and reached into his hip pocket. "Ah—ha, you certainly are a mu-mud—whatever you call yourself. Mudlark, eh? Well, here's to you."

Saying which he seized the utterly collapsed Tucker Dan and started in with the pocket edition of the brick-

"The gun was loaded
with bird shot."—Page 89.

bat. Tucker was right when he foretold a cyclone. Uncle Binny worked like a hero, and polished the boy in all directions. Mickey came up and danced round like a crazed hen trying to explain, but Uncle Binny didn't hear.

Suddenly the shouts of the pursuers were heard, and Tucker Dan by a supreme effort got loose and skinned through the fence, and ran for the fields in the distance.

Now the Martin coachman, hearing the racket, seized a shotgun that stood in the barn and joined in the chase of what he supposed was a thief. Hearing some one yell "Stop the murderer!" the man got excited and blazed away at the fugitive. Tucker Dan was a long way off and the gun was loaded with bird shot, but he leaped in the air with a cry as a dozen or so of the missiles

struck him—then he tottered, and fell into the arms of Uncle Binny, who had heard from the crowd the true story, and who now hugged the maltreated and unfortunate boy in a paroxysm of grief.

CHAPTER SEVEN

AT THE HOSPITAL

O kill a man under any circumstances is an unpleasant affair, though sometimes there are conditions governing the act that tend to lessen the pang of the afterthoughts; but to kill a man by mistake when one simply meant to flatten the fist against a friend's head, is very distressing to say the least.

Tucker Dan had plenty of time to think.

They took him to the hospital;—he himself wished to go home, and did not understand why they were so emphatic about the hospital until later. After they had put him in a cot he was

deeply worried to catch a glimpse of Tim Flaherty, the thinnest and nearest-sighted policeman in town, seated outside in the hall near the ward door.

Every time Tucker looked around the ward and towards the windows Mr. Flaherty wheeled in his chair in the hall and gazed pensively at him through his thick glasses. Then Tucker Dan began to understand. He was pretty well quenched, and the shot had not yet been removed, but he would have taken any reasonable opportunity for flight. But Flaherty, although near-sighted, was noted for his nimbleness of foot, and the opportunity was not yet come.

Through all the dismal despair of the occasion there was one ray of hope, however. Mr. O'Hara was not yet quite dead. He was in the hospital somewhere and Dr. Nash was trying to revive him, aided by the members of the house staff.

The nurse told Tucker Dan that there was a slim chance, and strongly advised him to wait. Anyway he felt that the brickbat and the bird shot had lamed him too much to justify immediate action, and he realized that to-morrow the effect would be even more noticeable. It was this realization perhaps that made sorrow heaviest on his young head. He must needs be patient. If his dear friend Mickey would only come!

He glanced at the door, and lo and behold there was Mick, hat in hand, entering sideways like a crab, both his eyes on Tim Flaherty. Never in all his life had Mickey been so respectful.

"Tucker Dan," came in a soft whisper.

"Mick."

"Keep yer back up, Tuck; he's still breathin'; dey's goin' to put three pans in his skull, Dr. Nash says."

Dr. Nash came around just then and looked at Tucker's injuries.

"Say, Doc," murmured the boy, "is he goin' to die?"

The physician shook his head non-committally.

Tucker Dan in his worriment blurted out, "You're goin' to put pans in his head?"

"Pans?" said the astonished doctor.

"Three pans," supplemented Mick anxiously. "I heard 'em talking about it in the hall."

Whatever Dr. Nash felt like inside he looked outwardly very solemn. "Oh, *trephine*, you mean! Yes, we may have to do that. But meanwhile we'll take the shot out of your hide, Tucker Dan."

But Tucker protested vigorously. "Nope, if O'Hara dies these stay with me. I deserve 'em, an' I'll keep 'em."

No amount of persuasion could affect

the boy; and finally they decided to let the shot remain for the time being rather than use force with him, as he was genuinely and greatly affected by the events of the day, and in poor condition for much harassment.

It was astonishing the number of friends who came to see Tucker Dan. Even Mr. Martin came and brought Salvina and Augusta. The coachman didn't come because he was detained by the police, awaiting the effect of Tucker Dan's injuries.

What Tucker couldn't understand was why Uncle Binny hadn't been arrested too. Many had seen him at work; but although the injuries he inflicted were worse to Tucker Dan than those inflicted by the coachman, he still remained at large.

Mickey remarked from behind Augusta's shoulder, "Yer Nuncle Binny

was a terrible cyclone, Tuck," and Tucker Dan glowered in mortification as he caught Salvina in a broad grin. "He'd ought to be arrested, too," he murmured.

"No," said Mr. Martin smiling, trying to keep the boy's courage up; "anybody who can raise the *wind* never gets arrested nowadays."

"Hully gee," Mickey bawled in appreciation. Salvina snickered and Tucker Dan couldn't keep serious any longer.

"That's it, Mr. Martin. Uncle Binny raises too much dust," he remarked with a twinkle.

"Oh," exclaimed Augusta.

"No, you don't mean 'Oh';—you mean dough," corrected Mickey.

Flaherty from his seat in the hall overheard the remarks and the chuckle that came from Tucker Dan, who had nearly forgotten his woes in the lively company. So Flaherty looked in at the party and

suggested pleasantly that Mr. Binny had been on a bat—or the bat had been on Tucker Dan; Flaherty didn't know which.

At this Tucker Dan got mad through and through and growled, but Salvina sat on the edge of the bed and kicked her heels, and Mickey and Augusta tee-hee-d so loudly that the nurse came around and cautioned them. Anyway Tucker Dan never forgave Flaherty for making such a remark before Salvina, and he then and there made up his mind to get even some day.

Soon the girls and their father started to go, and Salvina, lingering ever so little behind the others, cautiously slipped a rosebud into Tucker's hands. The boy hid it beneath the bedclothes lest Mickey should see, and before he could thank the pretty little maid she was gone. Augusta, too, had a rose, however, when she came in; and glancing sidewise, Tucker

Dan saw her slipping it to Mickey, who grabbed at it eagerly.

"I brought it for Tuck because he's sick; but I'd rather you'd keep it, 'cause he ain't sick enough," she said beneath her breath to Mickey as she followed her sister out. Mickey looked after her and then at Tucker Dan guiltily. The invalid maintained a severe calmness that was baffling, pretending not to have seen any of the byplay.

Then Connor began: "You needn't be afraid to show that rose, Tuck; I know you got it under the clothes."

"That's better than taking a rose that wasn't brought for you. You're second choice, Mickey,—gimme that rose you got."

"Nit," answered Mick blushing; "when you're sick I'm second choice maybe; but I'm first choice when you're well. —You're well now."

The argument might have grown warm but that Tim Flaherty stuck his head through the door and remarked caustically, "One'd think you'se were goin' to have a funeral, seein' the number of flowers you'se getting. Or begorra, is it a couple of marriages that's coming off?"

Mickey and Tucker Dan ground their teeth in dismay. Tim Flaherty was the last man in the world they would have trusted with their heart secrets; and now he had seen it all and wasn't a bit anxious to let them off easily.

"It seems to me," he continued, "that ye be getting pretty daring to be love-making at yer tender years. You boys'll get a tattoo played on yer if you don't manage to do better'n that. I'll have to tell me chums on the force to keep an eye on yez."

Tucker Dan was getting blue in the face and was about to say something rash,

when Dr. Nash again hove in sight and stood at the foot of the bed, a monumental mass of flesh and good nature.

"O'Hara has come to. You're safe, Tucker Dan Pils."

The victim forgot all about Flaherty in the exuberance of his joy, and Mickey forgot his respect for the man of surgery and remarked, "Bully for you, Doc."

The doctor sat down sidewise to the bed so that he could get nearer, and said something to the patient, who turned half over.

"All right," said Tucker Dan pointing vaguely to his back; "life is worth living now, Doc; you can pick the shot out now." And for two hours Dr. Nash picked.

Meanwhile Flaherty went home, and Tom Hooley, another member of the force, took his place on the chair in the hall. Hooley was a wonder. He was the next

biggest man to Dr. Nash in the county. He weighed two hundred and ninety, but was so short that they gave him regular sitting jobs only. He had been quite slim when he joined the force ten years before, but he had grown like a porpoise, and was now no good on the beat; though he could hold a chair down like a rivet. He was the exact opposite to Flaherty in appearance, and was the best laugher in the district. When he spied Dr. Nash picking shot from Tucker Dan he started in to laugh quietly, and he kept it up so long that he set his chair to thumping, and all the convalescent patients in the ward,—who couldn't see into the hall—grew anxious to know what kind of a machine had been put up there.

Finally Dr. Nash finished with the shot picking, and, followed by the house staff at a respectful distance, he made for the door in a dignified stride. Just at

this very moment Hooley suddenly made up his mind that he needed a drink, and, rising from his chair in the hall, made for the water tank just inside the ward door.

In this life things sometimes happen in a most curious manner. Hooley had been thirsty for an hour — and why did he make up his mind to drink at just the wrong moment?

Dr. Nash didn't see him,—neither did he see Dr. Nash; but in about two seconds they came together bows on, at the threshold. Hooley got an awful jolt, and Dr. Nash tottered in his tracks. Next instant they both advanced again on the recoil, and both got wedged in the doorway. Hooley faced north into the ward, Dr. Nash faced south into the hall, and neither could budge an inch. There they stood pressed like sardines in a box, and Hooley commenced to laugh. He gave one roar and the expanding of his

side crushed Dr. Nash so that the physician took a long breath in reprisals and crushed Hooley.

The ward was an interesting place for anybody just then.

"Mickey, for the love of Moses, bust that formation;—rush the centre," yelled Tucker Dan sitting up in bed; and Mickey, remembering that he owed Dr. Nash somewhat for professional services at the Martin house a few weeks before, took a flying leap at the back of that gentleman's knees; and the wedge collapsed like a balloon.

Dr. Nash's spotless clothes now looked second hand, and Hooley's uniform would have made a good souvenir. Mickey disappeared as Dr. Nash bowed low to Hooley and as Hooley bowed lower to the doctor. The incident was closed, but there was no sleep until late in the ward that night.

CHAPTER EIGHT

AN ATTACK OF THE GOUT

NCLE BINNY took to his bed and stayed there for some time. The minister called to see him two or three times and talked with him on the mistakes of life and how easy it was to rectify them. Dr. Nash interviewed him once and then told Aunt Amy that it was a clear case of the "mortifications" and that time would cure him; and if it didn't, he would advise her to get a divorce and let some one else have him. Aunt Amy felt quite hurt at the doctor's levity, especially when she remembered that it was largely her fault that her husband had developed a retiring disposition.

Tucker Dan improved rapidly and Mr. O'Hara got well without any kitchen utensils being inserted in his skull; and together they left the hospital in the same carriage. O'Hara bore no hard feelings, for he realized the nature of the accident, and besides he had had a week's rest and considerable comfort at the hospital; in fact, much more than he had ever enjoyed before in the same length of time. Uncle Binny expected to pay the bill; so that made O'Hara's enforced vacation a godsend, for he was a school-teacher, drawing the usual manly salary and he needed the rest.

Tucker Dan upon his arrival home went up-stairs to see Uncle Binny and to forgive him for what he had done. Uncle Binny looked careworn and sour, and Tucker Dan pitied him from the bottom of his heart.

Mr. Binny sat in an armchair, in his

dressing-gown, a syphon of soda on the table and a pitcher of milk alongside. It was evident he was on a light diet. When he saw his nephew he winced and extended his hand slowly.

"Tucker," he murmured, "the brick-batting was a mistake."

"It was, uncle."

"Yes, a painful mistake, if I remember correctly, Tucker Dan."

"Yessir."

"Well, you're all healed up now, so come and kneel at the side of your mother's brother, my boy."

Tucker Dan went, and looking up at the weasened face was suddenly seized with contrition. "I am going to reform, uncle," he whispered.

"So am I," blurted out Mr. Binny; then seeing his mistake, he corrected himself. "You need to, Tucker Dan

Pils, if anybody does; you and your dear friend Mickey."

"Will I have to start in on milk and soda, uncle, and will I have to keep myself in the house, where nobody can size me up?" There was a sly flash in Tucker Dan's near eye as he spoke.

Uncle Binny squirmed in his chair and said, "My milk diet, Tuck, is for the gout."

"I don't see why you need anything like that. Dr. Nash told me you had the 'mortifications' t' other day at the hospital, and I thought maybe if I had the 'sorrows' for what I'd done, I'd get the same dose."

Uncle Binny stood up in an instant. "Darn that mountainous mass of fat;—darn that Nash anyway. He said that, did he? He'll never doctor me any more." Then Uncle Binny heaved a magazine at the syphon of soda.

It hit. There was a great explosion, and the milk pitcher responded promptly, bordering the picture of the Prodigal Son on the wall with a layer of milk. Tucker Dan went under the table and thence he slid backwards under the bed.

Uncle Binny looked at the pieces of the syphon on the floor and the milk on the carpet and started to tear his hair, but he couldn't; it was creamed and slippery.

Aunt Amy looked in at the door shivering with fright. "Binny, what's happened?" she chattered.

Tucker Dan's uncle didn't say a word, but grabbed the waste-paper basket and shied it at his wife. He was overstrained and decidedly nervous. Aunt Amy backed down-stairs and locked herself in the kitchen, as Tucker Dan shouted, "It's only the gout, Aunt A. A. Uncle's got a terrible pain."

When Uncle Binny quieted down, he was of the same color and as mushy as a stewed tomato. "Tucker Dan," he murmured, "stick to that story. It's the gout; otherwise I'm lost. They'll have me in a rest cure sure."

"Yes," said Tucker Dan, feebly, taking the cue and appearing from under the bed. "Yes, uncle, which toe has got the gout? We got to tell a straight story."

"This one on the left. Paint it with iodine, Tuck. Make it look sick. Give it the devil."

Tucker Dan painted the left big toe with iodine, and for the first time in his life really began to get acquainted with his Uncle Binny.

"Tucker Dan," said the gentleman, "if this gets out, they'll say I'm clear gone. I rely on your honor as a man, to keep this quiet."

"Yep," answered Tucker Dan, who

now began to realize that after all his Uncle Binny was no "slouch." "Don't you think if I rub that big toe joint with the pumice stone, that it'll look redder, more like the gout?" he volunteered.

Uncle Binny tipped him a wink and Tucker Dan seized the pumice stone from the wash-stand and began to work energetically and carefully.

Then he put on some more iodine, and realized, after a minute, that he had rubbed some of the outer skin too much. Mr. Binny gave a whoop when the smarting began, and was on the bed in an instant, gyrating around like a dervish doing a twirl. "Heavens, Tucker Dan, heavens!" he yelled, "ain't you got any sense?"

Whenever Mr. Binny was excited he lost his grammar. "Throw the iodine out er the window, throw it out, you fool; throw it out or I'll throw you."

Tucker Dan threw it, and looked in blank amazement at his uncle as he tried to dip his toe in the wash-basin. "Golly," he murmured, "if that ain't the gout, it's a close second. I'll fetch Aunt A. A."

When she came, led by Tucker Dan, they put Mr. Binny to bed, and cleaned up the wreckage. Later, when she stepped down-stairs, Tucker sat on the edge of the bed, and seizing his uncle's hand, said, "Uncle Bin, I really didn't mean it—I didn't do it for revenge. Honest, I didn't."

Uncle Binny looked carefully at the boy and saw that he was speaking the truth. "Kid," he said, with shaking voice, "keep mum."

And Tucker, realizing that Uncle Binny was nearly a nervous wreck, stooped over and kissed him; and the man gently folded the youngster to his breast.

Uncle Binny and Tucker Dan were great chums after that.

The two had a long confab; what they discussed was strictly confidential, but it seemed to have a great effect on Tucker Dan. Aunt Amy noticed a change in him that night, and in a few days she saw that Mr. Binny was showing a desire to come out of hiding. There was a solemnity about the man and the boy that was most attractive, but so unnatural as to be alarming; especially was this the case with Tucker Dan, who went about his duties in a dignified and temperate manner that made Aunt Amy expect him to burst any minute.

"I don't know what ails Binny and the boy," she said, one day to Mrs. Connor; "but I declare to goodness if there ain't some mischief brewing then I'm no good."

"Mischief nothing," replied her neigh-

bor. "Mickey has got the same disease,—he's so all-fired sober that Mr. Connor's actually 'fraid he'll explode an' set things afire all at once."

"What do you suppose it is?" queried Aunt Amy dolefully.

"Reformation; nothing in the world but reformation. Your husband has been talking to Tucker Dan, and Tucker Dan has been filling my boy full of advice; I know it."

"The seed has fallen on a fruitful place," murmured Aunt Amy. "Binny was always a good talker."

"Well, I'll tell you how I know. I heard Tucker Dan tell Mick that being good wasn't so hard as being bad and getting shot."

Aunt Amy shook her head sadly. "It won't last. It's only temporary."

"Maybe, but there is no telling; those things spread sometimes. They do say

that Mick and Tucker Dan are just pitching into things at school."

"Guess that's so. Tucker Dan ain't doing any pitching in at home, 'cept into the food," remarked Aunt Amy with slightly more vivacity.

Mrs. Connor laughed as she started to go. "That reminds me, I heard Mick ask Tucker Dan if he thought they could reform Dr. Nash for Uncle Bin's sake; and Tucker Dan said the only way to reform Dr. Nash was to melt him into butter and pitch him into a new mould."

"And what did your boy say to that?"

"Well," chuckled Mrs. Connor, "Mick said if Dr. Nash would sell as butter he'd catch Mr. Hooley, the policeman, and melt him and start an opposition dairy."

"For the land's sake, sit down and

have another cup of tea," exclaimed Mrs. Binny. "Maybe the boys are poor specimens, but I declare to goodness I wouldn't trade 'em for the whole of Sorrento."

CHAPTER NINE

TUCK SEES THE DOCTOR

HE wave of reform had indeed struck home. Even Tucker's desire to get square with Policeman Flaherty had been forgotten for a while at least. Tuck was quite another fellow at school, and rapidly advanced to the head of his class, a position that was his by rights, but which he never before had attained, having been too busy with the more active pursuits of life. When he finally reached the top of the ladder Salvina was very proud, for she cherished a deep and developing affection for Tuck, and she was not jealous of him, for her position was next to the last in the class, and she

never expected to lead it herself, unless she led it backwards.

Salvina was a little beauty, and her bright blue eyes beamed in merriment always, but they didn't beam much mathematics and such things.

Augusta was somewhere near the middle of the class and always in doubt, as Salvina said. Nobody knew when Augusta might take a brace and reach the top, or when she might take a slide and drop into the next lower class with a mushy thud. Salvina's position next to the last, however, had been a steady one.

And last of all was Mickey. He never had been dropped, and never would be, for one hour's study a day sufficed to keep him hanging on. He didn't care about taking a scholarly brace. What was the use, as long as he hung onto the same class with Augusta and his dear friend Tucker Dan Pils?

But the reform movement was breaking up all happiness. Tucker was getting anxious to lead the universe, and his friends saw that he soon would be promoted.

One day the head and the foot of the class went home together and Mickey said, "Tuck, you're changed awful since you got up in the world. Salvina's afraid you are going to leave her behind."

"Mickey," said Tuck, "I'm going to better myself. You know yourself that we've been calves long enough. We're a couple of disgraces to our families. As for the girls, I'm through with them. I'm going to be a civil engineer."

"That's good," assented Mickey, "but did you see Salvina crying yesterday when you went home alone?"

"What you kiddin' me for?"

"Honest, I seen her and it was because

you wouldn't go home with her, Augusta says."

"Mick, you don't understand. I'm busy with my books,—I've reformed."

Mickey turned and faced his friend. "You're a fool, Tucker Dan Pils; you ain't worth two tears from any girl's eyes, and you're a boiled lobster and a chuck steak. You're so darned conceited that you've forgotten how to skin a rabbit; and you're missing all the fun in life. You're a bloated, good-for-nothing aristocrat, an' you make the chickens cackle when you go by."

Tucker Dan put down his books on the grass, and took off his coat as Mickey did likewise. "You sassy cuss," he remarked between his teeth. "You don't know what reform means."

"I know that reform on you looks like your Uncle Binny on that log swimmin' from the beach. Funny, so funny, I has

ter laugh. Your reform is tiresome, Tucker Dan Pils, and I'm going to bust it."

Mickey side stepped and led with his left, catching Tucker on the neck. The next moment Mickey bent over with his hand on his aching stomach. Then they clinched and rolled over on the grass.

The scholars rushed to witness the fight as the boys got up and yelled at each other. Then Mickey caught Tucker on the eye, and the champion of reform caught Mickey on the nose. But Connor was strong, and in another minute Tucker was on the ground, and Mickey was astride him.

"Promise not to reform any more," exclaimed the conqueror. "Promise or I'll break your slats."

"Go to ——" but Tucker who was now rolling over and over with his antagonist, said no more; for Mickey punched him

so hard that he was as limp as a rag.

Salvina bent over him and wiped the grass stains from his manly brow; and Mickey slung his books on his shoulder and walked off, remarking audibly, "Now you quit yer fooling, Pils, and come around and see me; but don't you give me none of yer reform."

Tucker Dan sat up. "Salvina," he whispered, "I'll go home with you next Friday, if you'll let me."

"All right," she lisped, "all right, but don't let any one hear."

Thus reform exploded, and love triumphed!

Tucker dropped from the top of the class immediately, and Uncle Binny lost control of him entirely. Mickey never said a word, but the twins regarded him with much respect. The fight had not

ruffled the school any; such occurrences were too common; but every one noticed that Tucker went home with Salvina on Friday.

Just before reaching her home that day he remarked to her, "I'll never forget how you wiped my face that day; it was awful kind."

"Oh! never mind, Tuck," she answered. "I couldn't help it. I—I—hate a stuck up fellow, and you looked so awful lopsy."

"Guess, I did," mused the boy. "Mick landed awful hard."

"Yes, Tuck," she whispered, as she extended her hand and placed it gently upon his, for a moment. "Yes, but I like you much better now; I like you very ——"

"Do you sure?" he exclaimed, as she dashed away from him with a teasing laugh. "Then I'm glad I got licked."

He wheeled, and went off towards the Binny home, whistling as loudly as he could. On the way he encountered Mickey perched on a fence, looking solemn as an owl. Tucker was mortified and passed him by; but Connor called to him, "Come here, you has-been, —ain't that a lot better than being a reformer an' head of the class?"

"What!" exclaimed the pedestrian, the color rising to his face.

"Making up to Salvina Martin,—you can't throw a bluff at me, you graduated reformer."

"I'll lick you; I'll maul you."

"Nit, not yet,—some other day. Be good and I'll tell you how to get even with Tim Flaherty."

"Go ahead," said Tucker Dan, taking a seat on the same rail with Mickey, and letting bygones be bygones at once.

"Well," began Mickey, "Tim Flaherty

has been telling all the force that you and I are in love, and you oughter hear them kid you behind your back."

Tucker glowered. "Why didn't you tell me before?"

"Because you got the reforms so bad you wasn't a darn bit interesting."

"Well?"

"Well, do you know, Tuck, what Flaherty's been doing to-day?"

"No."

"He was chasing a thief over Dr. Nash's back fence, and he plugged the doctor's hoss in the after leg with a bullet."

"Jiminy, then Dr. Nash would be a good one to see."

"'Seems to me so; he can't be overfond of Flaherty, and he does like us, so we might make a deal."

Tucker thought long and earnestly. "Leave it to me," he exclaimed. "I'll let you know."

"Remember," Mickey cried, as his friend disappeared in the distance, "I'm with yer."

"Sure."

The two were once again in action, and all past performances of unfriendly nature were, then and there, forgiven in the close bond of chumship and boyhood.

Tucker Dan wanted to see Dr. Nash awfully, but he did not want the physician to know that he was so anxious. He couldn't wait until evening, so he decided to see the doctor before his office hours.

First, he found great difficulty in swallowing, and complained of a pain in his left shoulder, and Aunt Amy thought a poultice would do; but Tuck demurred.

He then remembered that Uncle Binny wasn't very fond of Dr. Nash at present, so he acted accordingly.

"Aunt Amy, I don't want Uncle Bin

to know, it worries him so. He's had a lot of worries lately, but I do feel awfully sort er sick."

Mrs. Binny looked at him out of the corner of her eye and mentally decided that he did look somewhat sick.

Tucker tried to swallow some water and she saw that it hurt him.

"You better take this change," she said, as she handed him two fifty-cent pieces, "and go and see Dr. Nash; but don't let your uncle know."

It had worked out just as the boy had planned. "Thanks, Aunt Amy," he said. "I wouldn't worry poor Nunc; he can't stand much since that attack er gout."

"No, Tuck, he can't and the house can't; if he gets 'nother attack like the last one, I declare to goodness the chickens won't lay no more this season. They've got the hysterics now—they

cackle and cavort round whenever the horse whinnies, or the cow moos."

"Well," drawled Tucker, "yer can't expect 'em ter know everything; they didn't know it was a syphon of soda on a bust with Nunc Binny; but I guess I'll be going. So long, Aunt A. A. Thanks."

He seized his hat and slouched out of the door, intense misery and suffering on his face.

"I hope it ain't the shakes a coming on," murmured Aunt Amy; "but I declare to goodness I believe he's got the fakes pure an' simple 'stead er the shakes; he ain't had 'em for some time. This reform movement ain't a-going to last forever—no matter what Mrs. Connor thinks. We'll see Tucker Dan coming back cured pretty soon, shakes or fakes."

It was pretty hard to fool Aunt Amy.

Dr. Nash happened to be in when

Tucker called at five o'clock and the boy walked stoop shouldered into the office. The physician greeted him cheerily. "Hello, Pils, you look as though you needed more shot picking. What have they been doing to that back of yours?"

"I think I got the shakes, Doc; my throat an' back feel all gone."

Dr. Nash decided to have some fun with his young friend.

"What kind of an examination do you want?" he queried.

"Thorough," murmured Tuck, "thorough." Then as an afterthought he queried, "How much does it cost?"

The physician leaned back in his especially made chair, his eyes twinkling.

"Well, I tell you, Pils, we fellows have a system. Now if I look at your throat by electric light," and he pointed to the

expensive electrical outfit in his office as he spoke, "that will cost you two dollars. If I look at you up here near the window by sunlight—and it does just exactly as well, by the way—that will cost you one dollar in advance, examination of your chest thrown in."

Tuck saw the twinkle in Dr. Nash's eyes and walked slowly towards the window and gazed out upon the beautiful lawn and the woods.

He knew the night would be a glorious moonlight one. He thought a while, then turned and meandered towards the doctor's desk.

"Two dollars for electric light—one dollar for sunlight," he said, looking keenly at the doctor.

Then he fished up a fifty cent piece and laid it on the desk and walked to the door before the astonished physician knew what he was up to.

"What is that for?" enquired the man of weight.

"That's pay in advance," exclaimed Tucker Dan.

"Yes, but come here, it's one dollar the cheapest."

"Well," drawled the boy, "you've got a sliding scale of price to suit the light."

"Yes."

"Well, then I'll call again, to-night. The examination by *moonlight* will be fifty cents." And forth he slouched.

CHAPTER TEN

FLAHERTY GETS A LESSON

T eight o'clock that evening Tucker called to see Dr. Nash again. As he had told Mickey, who remained outside, the physician was too frisky in the afternoon; it wasn't any use trying to open up any conversation with a man when he felt too fly.

When the boy faced the doctor for the second time the man was considerably more dignified.

He had a wholesome respect for any one who could reduce fees as Tucker had done that afternoon. The fifty cents still stood on the desk, a reminder to both that the occasion was to be a serious one.

Dr. Nash looked his patient over carefully, then remarked, "I don't think you need anything except a rest in bed for a day or two. I'll 'phone over to Mr. Binny and tell him to put you there."

Tucker thought a moment and realized that the doctor had him. "I'll tell you, Doc," he laughed, "I came to find out how your hoss is getting along. Mick and I wanted to know, and we didn't wanter come 'less we were sick."

Dr. Nash smiled. "I suspected you, Pils. My horse is done for. Tim Flaherty is a near-sighted idiot."

"That's what we think, and Mick and I owe him a lesson."

The physician began to understand. Slowly he swung back in his chair.

"Ah! that love affair, eh?"

Tucker winced. "Say, Doc," he said, confidentially, "let me have a suit of your old clothes, will you?"

"What for?"

"We want to teach Flaherty a lesson—nobody'll know we did it. Flaherty's got ter find you dead in the road; and he can't see in the dark, and he will get in an awful scrape."

"Tucker Dan Pils," exclaimed the physician, "you want to stuff my clothes and palm them off for me?"

"Yep."

"Well, I won't give you any, you rascal, but," and here Nash looked out of the window, "if you saunter into the attic, you'll find what you want—only don't give me away."

Nash threw the fifty cents at Tucker and the latter went quickly up the back stairs.

"The house is empty, Tuck," remarked the doctor encouragingly. "But heaven help you if I see you steal."

Then he looked out of the window so

he couldn't see any one, or hear any one, or know anything.

After a few minutes the back door closed as a voice whispered, "So long, Doc—to-morrow night on the lane above the engine house. That's Flaherty's beat at night."

"I guess I'm doing wrong," mused the doctor to himself, "but I swear I was a boy once. It makes me sad to think how old I am. I'd give anything to be a kid again."

He watched Mickey join Tucker under an apple-tree, and saw the two disappear in the moonlight, along the border of a corn-field, a bundle between them.

Silently the two boys made their way to an old barn some distance from the Binny homestead and deposited their burden in the loft.

"We'll get to work to-morrow, Mickey," remarked Tucker. "We'll have to hook the stuff to fill these clothes with."

"We'll have to steal a couple of haystacks at least," answered Mickey, as he gazed at the size of the coat as it lay spread out on the floor.

"I think we'll have to start in now," mused Tucker. "It'll take an all-fired lot of work to make this Dr. Nash look lifelike. I guess we better fill the trousers with apples."

They tied the ends of the legs and filled one with the fruit from a collection down-stairs in the barn. Suddenly Mickey yelled, "Pour 'em out again, pour 'em out; see I can't move the thing at all now, an' we only got one leg full."

"Hully gee, apples are 'steen times too heavy. There's nothing to do but use hay in a case like this. Did you ever see such a big man as Dr. Nash in your life?" laughed Tuck.

They foraged and used up considerable

hay that night. But they left the stuffing only partly done, and returned to it next morning, which was Saturday. Never did boys work harder, and by nightfall they had a pretty good likeness of Dr. Nash, head and all.

They had bought a mask at the knick-knack store, and it served as a fair likeness of the physician as he would look when killed. Altogether their work was artistic as circumstances allowed.

At seven that evening Tucker and Mickey advanced stealthily to the barn, heading a squad of boys who were in the secret. They carried the stuffed Dr. Nash down the stairs and out of the barn door in silent sorrow. They feared every minute for his life. Once or twice they turned him over and bent him up, in order to get him down the stairs. But they got him out into the woods finally without being seen, and without his fall-

ing to pieces at the belt line, his weakest spot.

Then they laid him down and held a consultation. Mickey was sitting on the well-filled stomach, his feet barely reaching the ground, and Tucker Dan was astride the chest.

"Say, boys," exclaimed the master-builder Tucker, "did you ever see such a colossus?"

"Never," exclaimed the chorus; "never like this—we've all seen the original, though."

They all laughed in glee.

"If the real Dr. Nash could see this Dr. Nash there'd be a funny time," exclaimed one of the boys.

"Sure," interjected Mickey. "He'd laugh till this one would burst open from sympathy. Doc's a nice fellow."

"Well, we better get along, boys."

"March, march, to the tree by the

brook as it crosses the Fireman's lane," ordered Tucker in a singsong.

They swung the hay made monster off the earth, and stepped away in silence like well drilled soldiers, keeping always in the shade and avoiding the moonlight.

It was a sight worthy of a better subject than a stuffed physician. The boys finally arrived at the brook under the tree, and there they deposited the giant once more on the ground.

Tucker Dan pulled him so that he lay in the lane in the shade with the feet out and head near the tree.

Then one of the smallest of his aides-de-camp stole back to the barn and returned with a can of fresh red paint. This, Tucker and Mickey spilled profusely over the face of the figure and down on the stuffed chest.

Then all the boys but the two leaders hid behind a stone wall near by, and

"With a can of fresh red paint."—Page 138.

watched Tucker and his dear friend Mickey do a mysterious thing.

They dragged a long piece of hose from the woods where they had hidden it, and fastened one end under the stuffed vest, after passing it through the coat sleeve. The part of the tube that led away from the body they covered with leaves; and then Tucker got behind a stone and took the other end and said things through it to Mickey, who listened attentively as he leaned over the stuffed monster.

"Hully rats," he exclaimed with a whoop, "I can hear all you say, Tuck. It sounds as though Dr. Nash was talking through his chest, or something. But he's got an awful voice for fair."

"Hooray," exclaimed the chorus behind the stone fence. "Hooray for Tucker Dan and for Mick."

Then all was quiet awaiting the com-

ing of Mr. Tim Flaherty, the near-sighted policeman, who was now about due on this part of his beat.

He came at last. They could see him in the distance.

He was tired and disgusted and soliloquizing to himself.

"That there hoss I plugged for that fat doctor yesterday morning is going to kick der bucket, sure, and I see me finish on de police foorce, unless I can work somehow so as to see the doctor. As he do be a gentleman maybe we can come to turrums."

He trudged along. He was destined to see the doctor all right, but he little expected the manner of his meeting.

Suddenly Tucker Dan fired a revolver a couple of times and Mickey let out an awful roar. It sounded like a panic-stricken hyena.

All the boys behind the fence held their breaths; it was getting so realistic that they had all they could do to keep from jumping into next fourth of July.

Tucker and Mickey hid carefully and Mr. Tim Flaherty waltzed backwards a dozen steps before he could collect his courage.

"It's mur-rder!" he exclaimed as he drew his night stick and his revolver.

"It's done; it's too late," he muttered as he dashed forward as became a brave officer of the law.

He hurdled over a couple of boulders and sprinted ahead for the tree.

"Surrender, ye villion," he yelled as he fired a couple of shots that barked the tree about fifty feet in the air. "Sur-r-ender or be gobs I'll have yer."

Then he fired another shot and bored a hole in the air forty feet to the left of the tree.

Next minute he stumbled over the ready made Dr. Nash.

"I'll arrest ye; be all the divils—I'll arrest ye."

He grabbed the body by the head and the red paint daubed his arm.

"Blud," he murmured as he realized that he had arrested the murdered man. Then he knelt down and peered near-sightedly at the body. There could be no mistake, there was only one man so large in the county.

"It's Dr. Nash," he cried. "Dead—dead—help, help—hel-lup."

The face was cold. The murderer had done his work only too well. Tim Flaherty groaned, and then Tucker Dan spoke softly through the tube, and the words came from the murdered man.

"You're next, Tim."

Flaherty straightened up and shook himself; it wasn't possible that such a

cold murdered man could speak. He was certainly dreaming or nervous to the borderland of hysteria.

"He must be dead, sure," he cried, and then Tucker Dan spoke again.

"He's after you, Tim Flaherty; run."

The voice was ghostly, the surroundings oppressive, the atmosphere hot, and Tim Flaherty jumped seven feet at the first leap and started for the engine-house down the hill, like a troubled policeman. He was so troubled that he fell and rolled into the back door of the engine-house.

"Mu-rr-der," he cried. "Dr. Nash is killed on the road and he can still ta-l-l-k, begorrah."

He headed the crowd back up the hill and led them to the body. They looked with the aid of lanterns and the boys behind the fence one and all, burst out in chorus,

"Guess again, Flaherty."

The firemen took the policeman back to the engine-house and closed the doors carefully. Then they talked with Flaherty and argued with him and sent for the real Dr. Nash to fix him up.

He was a wreck, a total wreck for a week.

Dr. Nash got home early that morning escorted by half the town. As he went to bed he muttered,

"Tucker Dan Pils, you're the greatest press agent any man ever had. What an advertisement you have given me, and it was all done according to professional ethics."

CHAPTER ELEVEN

A BRACE OF LOVERS

HE town of Sorrento was one of those beautiful spots that one finds occasionally along the New England coast. Its streets were wide, its houses large and spacious and not too old-fashioned for modern comfort; for Sorrento was a comparatively newly settled place, and Puritanism had never effected its growth or had much to do with moulding its thoughts.

Its chief industry was shoes; everybody who was some one owned a shoe store, or a factory dedicated to the making of soles.

It was well supplied with churches, and the ministers were all fat, a mighty good sign; meaning of course that it was

comparatively easy to marry rich girls in Sorrento, for whoever heard of a minister getting fat on his own income in a New England town. Along with its other advantages the place had a good reputation for ventilation.

The Atlantic breezes swept in about twice a month from the east and lifted a roof or two, and in winter the trolleys quit running because the electricity couldn't get conducted properly. Altogether the town was an agreeable one, and Mr. George Binny had never regretted entering the shoe business of Walker & Co., the biggest concern in Sorrento.

Uncle Binny had never reached the top; but he made a good confidential man and drew a fair salary, and Walker & Co. thought he was all right, if a trifle uncertain. After that day on which Mr. Binny rode the log across the harbor and

later sailed over the back fence with Martin's coachman after him they entertained some private fear that he might one day stand on the court-house steps, dressed in a polka dot shawl, and start in dancing a Hoola dance.

By good behavior and strict attention to business, however, Uncle Binny was dissipating these fears.

But Mr. Budd, the junior member of the firm, had a son named Henry. While Mr. Binny got along first-rate with the members of the firm, Tucker Dan and his friend Mickey didn't fancy Henry, who was known as Hen at school. He belonged to the same class as Tucker and he had jumped to the position of leader of that class when he first went there, and had stayed in that position, held for such a short time by Tucker before him. Henry Budd was bright and a fine looking fellow ; a first-class athlete

as well as scholar. He could run a tie with Tuck and Mickey, and was in every way a decidedly popular fellow, save for his citified airs which displeased the boys, but caused many a heart pang to the girls.

It soon became evident to many that things were not going well with Tucker Dan that spring. He began to fail in health and spirits, and for some unaccountable reason Mickey had the same symptoms. They acted in a listless manner and had no appetite, and their flesh simply melted off them.

Dr. Nash, who saw the boys quite frequently about town, began to take a professional interest in observing them from the corners of his trained eyes.

To his mind Pils and Mickey Connor were in trouble. It looked like silent grief. Then Dr. Nash began to notice that Tucker did not go home with Salvina

any more, and that he never saw Mickey dancing attendance on Miss Augusta.

Then Mr. Connor, senior, and Uncle Binny began to worry about the boys, and talked it over amongst themselves. They decided to send them to see Dr. Nash. Something surely was wrong. Tucker had only eaten five sausages for breakfast one morning that week; and Mickey was so off his feed that he wouldn't eat buckwheat cakes any more, even if his mother made them half butter, half cakes, and threw in enough syrup to float them.

The boys started to the doctor's together one Saturday morning early. They got tired and sat on a log in the woods and looked at each other. Both were sheepish.

"Say, Tuck, what ails you anyway?" exclaimed Mickey with a bold commanding note in his voice.

"Nothing at all much; ain't got an appetite."

"Why ain't you got an appetite? You got to tell me the truth, Tuck."

Tucker Dan looked at Mickey and saw that it was no use to refuse, so he delved deeply into his shirt bosom and pulled out a crumpled piece of paper.

"Read that," he exclaimed woefully. "I got it six weeks ago; read it, Mick."

Connor took it and unfolded it before him on the log and read:

"MR. TUCKER DAN PILS,

"DEAR SIR:

"I cannot call you Tuck any more, because I must be true to myself and tell you that I don't love you anywhere near so much as I did. I like you, Pils, but I don't want to walk home any more with you. We must part forever. It is awful, but it must be.

"Your friend always

"SALVINA."

Mickey looked at Tucker Dan calmly and returned the note. Then Tucker sighed and hung his head, and reached out his arm and clasped it about Mickey's neck and drew his lifelong friend towards him.

"It's awful, Mick," he sobbed; "and—an'—she calls me 'Pils' now."

Mickey didn't say a word, but pulled a letter out of his own bosom and handed it to Tucker, who took it eagerly and read it. It went like this —

"MR. MICHAEL CONNOR:

"I find that my affection has cooled forever, Mick. I shall always call you Mick 'cause I really like you awfully, but I cannot love you as I did. The dear sweet days are now gone, Mick. Keep up your courage and be a man and try and forget me, and get another girl and be happy as you deserve; but don't make it hard for me, dear Mick.

"Your friend forever,

"but not your sweetheart,

"AUGUSTA."

Tucker Dan stood up. "Listen, Mickey," he cried, "listen. Mine says,' 'It's awful but it must be,' and yours says, 'Don't make it hard for me, dear Mick.' What do you think of that? Ain't that trouble?"

"The blows are so hard I don't want to live, Tuck," mumbled Mickey. "You and I have been turned down."

"Turned down! We've been turned inside out; but there's nothing to do; we're poor and they're rich, and—and—Mickey Connor, we've just got to be men."

"Yep—but I ain't got no appetite."

"Do you expect to wanter eat after such a thing as that? Y-a-h!" exclaimed Tucker. "Brace up and be a man."

"Can't brace up," said Mickey sorrowfully. "I ain't had a square meal in a month."

"I ain't drunk anything but milk for a week," retorted Tuck; "but say, brace up and let's see Dr. Nash. He'll give us something to brace on, and if you don't tell him he won't know we've been turned down."

Mickey shook himself and together they went to see the man who wouldn't know.

Fortunately there were no patients waiting and the boys were admitted one by one. Mickey first, because he was the older.

Mick thought he would die of suffocation when he saw Dr. Nash in his chair. The doctor looked as though he had been eating some of the hay that was used to stuff his double on the night of Flaherty's lesson. Mickey gasped in amazement. It was evident Dr. Nash had gained in weight. The physician understood.

"Come in, Connor," he said. "I've been gaining the flesh that you and Pils have been dropping lately; only thirty-five pounds—I am three hundred and fifty-seven now."

The doctor stood up, and as was his wont with the boys, remarked jovially, "How do I look, now?"

"Like a dressed up gentleman," muttered Mickey in alarm. "You look too big to be comfortable though."

"Well, you see, Mickey, I am too old to fall in love. That's what takes the flesh off people."

Mickey sat down on the edge of a chair and swelled himself out as far as possible.

"I'm losing weight, Doc," he volunteered.

"Yes, I know; you have been in love and have been turned down; your face shows it."

Mickey gasped in amazement as the physician continued,

"You go. Forget it, and if you don't get over it, I'll tell the fellows. You don't need any medicine."

Mickey stood up and groaned like a sick ape.

"Say you're right; but let me stay in here while you talk to my friend Tucker Dan Pils."

"All right," exclaimed the doctor; "Pils, next."

Tucker came slouching in and looked suspiciously at Mickey who remained standing.

The doctor stripped Tucker to the skin and drew marks on his chest and thumped him, while Mickey had great difficulty in suppressing his laughter.

Then he listened to the heart and gazed learnedly at Pils.

"Sorry, but you've got heart disease. You're struck with an arrow from the god Cupid's bow."

Tuck smiled like a sick boy. "Is that all, Doc?" he murmured bravely.

"No, you've got a complication. We call it calfitis."

"What's that?" remarked the boys in chorus.

"That's the high English for the first attack of love."

Mickey sat down on the floor and gazed up at Tucker's naked chest and then stuffed his head in his hands and howled with joy.

"Calfitis, Tucker Dan—there's no hope for us," he shouted. "Doc is on! Doc's on!"

"Take one good revenge and get fat again, boys," remarked the doctor.

"Revenge!" chorused the two with eagerness.

"Yes, revenge. When two boys get turned down by two girls they'd better get together and hunt for the man in the case," remarked Dr. Nash. "When I was young we usually did that."

"The other man, hully gee!" exclaimed Mickey. "I am on, Tucker Dan, I am on."

"So am I."

"We will hunt the other man," and together they walked out.

When they got outside Tucker remarked, "That Dr. Nash is a peach."

"Yep, he's got second sight," asserted Mickey. "He's too darned smart for comfort."

"He's a clairvoyant."

Then they shouted back together, "So long, Doc! We are going to hunt the other man. He must be Hen, dear Hen Budd."

CHAPTER TWELVE

HENRY'S BUSY DAY

TUCKER DAN led the way back to the log, which both boys bestrode, fanning one another. Said Mickey from his seat on the thick end,

"Tuck, we don't know as much as doctors."

"Not as much as Dr. Nash," assented Tuck; "but Nunc Binny says some doctors don't know enough to chase hens."

"Anyway, Pils, you an' I've been a couple of boiled lobsters."

Tucker looked gloweringly at his dear friend Mick.

"Skinny," he said, "I'd as soon fight you again as not. You told Doc that I had the—the——"

"Calfitis! haw! haw! ho! No, I didn't, honest! Honest—I never heard of the disease."

"Well you told him I had the moonstrokes."

"I didn't. He told *me* I had the loves, and course he knew you had 'em, too. We've both had the moonstrokes, Tuck; we've been a couple of tra-la-loos."

Tucker Dan got up. "Mick," he said trying hard to swallow his mortification, "I think we better interview Hen Budd some day. He has done us up."

"I think Hen Budd, dear Hen, you're in need of friends," murmured Mickey, as he got up and took hold of Tuck's arm. "Ter think, Tuck, that anybody could size us up for a couple of rejected swains."

Tucker Dan hung his head in deep thought.

"What's der matter?" queried Mick

in sympathy. "Don't let a girl sear your soul that way; I'm over my blow."

"I'm only thinking," murmured Tucker, "about what to do to Henry."

Mickey stood off and threw his head forward while his neck was nearly dislocated, and looked keenly and melodramatically at his friend.

"You invent the scheme,—but I'll start the ball rolling for you. My specialty is doing stunts. I ain't any good at inventing."

Tucker mused a while. "Next Saturday are the athletic games at school, Skinny Mick; next Saturday Hen Budd will beat us all in the hundred yard dash."

"Yep, I give in already, Tuck. He can beat me two feet any way."

"He can beat me about a foot an' a half," said Tucker; "and he thinks he'll

keep Salvina and Augusta on his string, does he?"

"He do," assented Mick, ungrammatically, as usual, when excited; "he thinks he can do Tucker Dan Pils and Mickey Connor."

"I think, Mick, that we'll lose the race maybe; but I think you an' I'll go home with Salvina and Augusta and the rest of the bunch."

"Hooray for you, Tuck; you've got a scheme. I knew you'd never fail."

"I have got an idea, I have. Lead me, Mick—lead me to a brook in the woods where there's mud, and where you an' I can think."

Mick began to tremble with excitement.

"Come on," he cried as he led the way; then as he looked sideways at his friend he said to himself, "Tucker looks awful queer in the eye—he's got a prize winner in his attic this time sure."

Later, the two boys might have been seen deep in the woods, eagerly scanning the neighborhood of marsh ponds, and following the course of the many streams.

They held no conversation. Each was company unto himself, but each was wide awake. Suddenly Mickey struck a motionless attitude; then began to tiptoe towards a spot in a hollow between two stones, which was half filled with muddy water. There was a quiet splash and a dark object disappeared under the surface. Mickey started after and in his hurry lost his footing and sat down all over the landscape.

Tucker pulled him out, and dejectedly the two proceeded on their mysterious way.

Suddenly Tucker, stick in hand, executed a turn and capsized an object that was making its escape.

"That'll do," exclaimed Mickey, as

both studied the object and put it into a meal sack. "He'll do."

"Yep," assented the captor; "trouble 'bout these snapping turtles most of 'em are too big. This one ain't such a weight to carry."

"Haw! haw!" bellowed Mickey; "Hen won't scarcely notice this handicap;" and the two hunters chuckled in glee at the prospect of revenge.

The day of the school athletic games was a brilliant one in every way. The sky was cloudless, the atmosphere was clear and the birds were singing.

A mile outside of the town was the athletic field, with its greensward, greener than usual, and its half-mile track encircling it like a band of silver. The grand stand was filled at two o'clock. Sorrento was there in full representation. Business men had made a half-holiday of it and the ladies were there to make the

half better. Boys were there from the schools all about, and the girls, bless them, were there because the boys were. They didn't know much about athletics but they knew enough to know that it was first and last their day.

Salvina and Augusta were seated in a box with the Budds, on Hen's invitation.

Uncle Binny and Mr. Connor were in company with Dr. Nash, who had to pay for two seats in the grand stand for himself. He sat on the lower tier near the track, so in case the boards gave way he might recuperate without precipitating a panic.

About a quarter of a mile beyond, the half-mile track skirted a rocky elevation, on the other side of which was a railroad track going through a cut.

A gang of Italian laborers, about twenty in number, were lounging on the rocks enjoying the sight and taking a

"Salvina and Augusta were there."—Page 164.

rest from their work. They all had picks or spades and were jabbering more than usual. It seemed that their cook in the shanty near by had lost his small frying-pan, and their midday meal had not been as satisfactory as usual.

Every one wanted to know where the frying-pan was, but no one cared to look for it, as the athletic games were the centre of attraction. But nevertheless all realized that if that pan was not found there wouldn't be any more hot stuff to eat for awhile.

The games started, and all was excitement when the event of the day was reached. It was the hundred yard dash. Every one in town looked for a record, for Hen Budd had a reputation for fleetness of foot that made him the centre of all eyes. Tucker Dan Pils had equaled his time, it was acknowledged, and some even said that Mickey Connor might win

in a pinch; but many thought the two boys were too thin—overtrained they said—for this special occasion.

Dr. Nash knew that it was not overtraining, and somehow he had a deep premonition of trouble. Even Uncle Binny and Mr. Connor who sat with the doctor were uneasy about the race. The three had noticed that Tucker and Mickey were sublimely indifferent to one another, and they could not quite attribute it to jealousy.

"Binny," whispered the doctor, "there's going to be something doing pretty soon."

"Guess yes—look at Hen Budd."

Down the track one hundred yards the runners were lining up for the dash which was to terminate in front of the grand stand. Budd was limbering up in his racing trousers and his white sleeveless shirt. His splendidly

proportioned figure created a sensation.

Mickey Connor threw aside his blanket and made a second sensation. He was so thin he looked like a wish-bone out for an airing.

Then others limbered, and lined up to the scratch. Last of all Tucker Dan Pils threw off his blanket; and he nearly created a veritable panic.

He was certainly out to win the race. His trousers were just as short as those of the others, but they were made of black silk, and his thin chest was clad in a fawn colored undershirt. The other boys smiled, then laughed, and Dr. Nash remarked to his friends,

"Watch Tucker and Mick. They're up to snuff. The others are laughing; and laughing before a race is the worst possible thing to do. Binny, that Tuck of yours knows that; he's out for the honors."

"And my Mickey is helping him," chuckled Connor; "what's he carrying his cap in his hand for? I bet there's something in that cap, all right."

There was no time to discover, for the pistol cracked and away the contestants flew. It was a beautiful start. Mickey was near the fence on the inside and next to him was the expected champion of the school associations, Hen Budd. Next came the other boys, and outside of all Tucker Dan, the boy in the black and fawn.

In less than two seconds every one saw that Budd had pulled away from the others near him, and that Mickey on the inside right next to him was running as he never ran before, but was losing inch by inch, and many shouted to him to drop his cap, but he didn't.

A few feet to the outside came Tucker, running in beautiful style, and to all appearances holding his own with Budd.

They came flying down the stretch together. Neither Tuck nor Budd knew anything that was going on now, save that their hearts were thumping in their chests, their feet striking automatically on the ground like frozen members, and their faces flushing. Then came the next two seconds that seemed eternity to them. Their heads no longer appeared to them to be on their shoulders, their eyes could no longer fix the tape ahead. The air seemed to waver with a rhythmic undulant motion, the silence was the silence of eternity; and still the silence was theirs only. The noise was really deafening as the spectators urged them on.

One second more and Tucker Dan's head wobbled; unknown to him Budd forged three inches to the front.

This was Mickey's opportunity. He had fallen behind from the other two

some eighteen inches, and when Budd forged to the front Mickey threw forward his hand—the hand that held the cap—and grazed Budd's leg with it. It looked like a desperate attempt to keep his balance, and no one knew what had happened save that Mickey staggered, fell back, and landed on all fours, a beaten boy—his cap still in his hand.

But by his well timed movement he had given the snapping turtle inside it a chance. The goal was only a few yards away, and Henry Budd was still in the lead, but the turtle was with him, attached to the side farthest from the crowd.

At first it pecked gently, and Budd made a wonderful leap, but Tucker Dan stuck to him like grim death. Then the turtle tried again, this time with better success ; and Hen Budd war-whooped like an Indian while Tuck forged to the front

amid wild applause, the winner of the greatest race ever run thereabouts.

Budd sat down on the track, and chased himself in a circle as a dog chases its tail, while the crowd, which didn't know anything about the turtle, began to think real hard.

"I've got a terrible pain," he yelled, as he jumped up and over the track rail, landing on the back of his head on the grass.

He couldn't see anything but he felt a heavy drag behind him.

"I'm done for, I've busted something," he yelled again as he took the first three tiers of the grand stand in a graceful bound.

No one could stop him. He rushed in and out in panic and nobody knew what it was all about.

But the turtle had secured a poor hold of Hen's trousers near the knee; it now

snapped again. This time it got Hen for fair. With a succession of sounds that seemed to be some new kind of opera in rehearsal Budd galloped down the track and scaled the rocky heights where were the Italians, and dashing into the railroad track made for Chicago.

The Italians saw the long necked turtle and decided that Henry Budd had somehow gotten hold of the missing frying-pan, and was speeding with it.

They tumbled onto the track, spades and picks in hand and started after him, yelling like fiends. Hen looked back and decided to keep right on.

Mickey sought out his friend, Tucker Dan.

"I hated to do it, Tuck, but I obeyed your orders," he exclaimed.

"I thought the stunt would work out all right," chuckled the other as they watched the crowd headed by the police-

man, Tim Flaherty, join in a pell-mell pursuit of poor Henry. "And I think we better go home with the twins now."

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

FOUR HEARTS

HE Budd family was much downcast over their only son's foolish caper. Even they thought he knew enough not to monkey with a snapping turtle; but they saw plainly that they were mistaken.

It was evident that while he was a splendid scholar and an excellent runner he didn't know enough to keep scandal from the family doors, and he needed watching.

Anyway, whether he needed it or not, Dr. Nash took care of him for several days. The physician treated the case surgically and told Hen that he was glad

he had been such a fleet runner. If he had not rattled the turtle by his speed there would have been no telling what might have happened.

The injured boy recovered to find himself the most amusing thing in town. Every one called him "Turt," and his life was made miserable. The girls simply passed him with glassy stares that froze his marrow, and the boys said things at a distance. He did not return to school next fall, for his father thought he had better take a rest and work in the factory for the benefit of the family name.

Salvina and Augusta paid lots of attention to Tucker and Mickey, but the boys were decidedly frigid and distant to the twins at first.

Since Tucker had won the race he was king-pin of the town, for no one knew how the turtle had got fastened to Hen

Budd, and Mickey, staunch friend that he was, never revealed his part in the affair. He limped around for a day or so and complained of his foot, and explained his miserable fall in the race by saying, "Me left fut got outer time with me right fut, and me cap got outer time with me two futs, and all I could do was to finish the race on me belly."

Wherever Tucker Dan went Mickey hopped along too; and wherever they two meandered, Salvina and Augusta appeared somewhere in a not distant perspective. Hen Budd was forgotten, and Tucker and his right bower were it.

Finally one day as early fall was approaching, after the boys had strained the girls' affection as far as girls could stand it, Tucker received a forget-me-not inside of a walnut, and Mickey found a rose inside of a paper shoe box on the back doorstep.

Then the two boys met and reported to one another.

"We've got 'em going, all right, all right, Mick," mused Tucker Dan.

"Yep, it's our prestige," remarked Mickey with a long French accent. "We got *prestige!*"

"Naw," grunted Tucker, "it's our shapes."

"Nit," retorted Mickey; "if we traveled on our shapes we'd be in the scrap iron heap. You oughter seen yerself when yer lined up for the race. I thought ye were a plucked chicken, sure."

"Maybe, but you looked like a piece of canned asparagus. And your pants—oh—haw! haw! haw!"

"Don't make any difference," mused Mickey abashedly; "we've made a hit with the twins, and we're a couple of idiots if we don't make up."

Tucker nodded. "Let's settle things, Mick. We're slow."

"All right."

And then the rest was easy. All the rest of that summer the two boys and the twins had a delightful friendship, which grew serious as school-time approached.

One day Mickey and Augusta were walking through the woods together, when suddenly he stooped towards her and whispered something softly in her ear as he put his arm on her shoulder.

She colored like an autumn peach, but she shook her head and replied, "No, Mike, dear, wait till you're older—then maybe you can. Mamma says we're altogether too young now for such nonsense."

Poor Mickey stubbed his toe and landed with his face in an oak-tree just at this moment, and Augusta laughed so

that he laughed too; and he had to postpone his courtship.

But Tucker Dan was doing better with Salvina about half a mile back. They were sitting on a log together, and she was speaking softly.

"Tuck," she said, "you won that race in great style. I am proud of you."

To his credit Tucker Dan winced a little.

"But," she continued, "I think Mickey helped you. Mickey had something to do with that turtle."

"Mickey won the race for me," declared Tucker in an outburst of confidence; "but don't give it away."

"I guess not," she retorted earnestly; "don't I know it was you that schemed it out? You've got a great head, Tuck."

Tucker saw that things were right with Salvina, so he drawled, "I'm glad we did

it anyhow; otherwise I wouldn't be here with you—see?"

She blushed. "I'm glad you did," she assented. "You made Hen Budd sick."

"Yep; we were regular kids last spring," he said, reminiscently.

"Kids," she laughed merrily. "What are you now, Tuck? We're all boys and girls."

"No," exclaimed Tuck bravely; "no, I am most a man, and I love you—I love you awfully much."

Salvina sprang to her feet, the bright glow of the evening sun playing gently upon her pretty face, and walking towards her companion with the grace of the coming woman she seized him by the hand and helped him up.

"I'm so glad," she whispered gently. "Come, Tuck, let's go home together—you and I."

Thus they walked together towards her home,—he, serious, boyish, casting loving glances at her—she, looking down and saying softly with the tender tones of the woman that was to be—"you and I, Tucker—you and I."

Arriving at home, they found Mickey and Augusta, still unwilling to part.

They chatted a few moments, and then Tucker remarked to the girls as he and Mickey started to go,

"Say, girls, Aunt A. A. is going to give me a birthday dinner next Monday, and she's going to invite just a few. You'll both come, sure, won't you?"

"Who else is coming?" queried Augusta.

"Will it be sober?" chimed Salvina, with a twinkle in her eye.

"Doc Nash is coming, sure," exclaimed Tucker; "an' he's enough to keep it sober all right. Nunc Binny is going to

give him a trunk for a chair, and the trunk is going to be filled with bricks so Doc can't fall through."

The girls chortled in chorus, "We'll be there;" and, laughing, they ran together into the house.

Mickey and Tucker walked back into the woods and sat on a log.

"What luck, Tuck?" queried Mick with a sigh.

"Oh, it's all fixed, old man;—we'll be married some day," was Tucker Dan's drawling answer.

Then he looked at Mickey out of the corner of his eye.

"What happened to you? You look rejected," he remarked.

"Me fut! I stubbed me fut just when I was getting close to me subject, and me face landed on the trunk of a tree—and she laughed, she did."

"Oh, gosh!" bawled Tuck. "Your

darned fut. *Your fut*—take it to Doc Nash and get it amputated."

Then he took pity on poor Mickey, and putting his arm on his shoulder, continued,

"Never mind, Mick. I got something for you to do for the dinner."

Mickey brightened. "What?"

"Read up on tarantulas. Get a book and study 'em."

"Ain't ever seen any. Do they eat 'em?"

"Naw—they're spiders. I want the conversation to turn on tarantulas. Look 'em up in the books."

Mickey looked in amazement at Tucker and started homeward in disgust.

"Look here, Mick," said Tuck, "you read up on tarantulas. And you get me a mouse, too. I want a mouse."

"Mouse? What's tarantulas got to do with a mouse?"

"You be darned! You do as I tell you, Mick. You get a mouse—mouse—*mouse!*"

Mickey's eyes began to bulge in expectancy, and Tucker added mysteriously —"You bring me that mouse. I got a trap with a sliding door in it."

"Honest?"

"Yep."

"Tucker Dan, I'll get you that mouse if I have to do an autopsy on a cat;" and Mickey ambled off.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

TUCK'S DINNER

ONDAY came bright and gay, and Mickey arrived with a mouse which Tucker and he put carefully in the trap.

They held a short consultation in the barn, and then went indoors to help Aunt Amy get the things on the dinner table.

The guests were all in the parlor; Mr. and Mrs. Martin and the twins, Mr. and Mrs. Connor, and Dr. Nash. Nunc Binny was stepping round with a broad smile and a happy sermon in his face, and Dr. Nash was standing in the centre of the room wondering which way to turn without having a collision with

some article of less resistance. The twins were whispering in the corner and watching the boys in the dining-room, while the boys themselves were busy putting something under the table and keeping Aunt Amy in the dark as to what was being done.

Then everybody marched in to dinner, and Nunc Binny apologized for seating Dr. Nash on a loaded trunk; the physician took it gracefully and said if they had offered him anything else to sit on, except the piano, he would have stood up. Then he told how he had had to have his carriage made to order out of planks, and how his office chair was growing smaller every day because the fool manufacturers had refused to put reefs in as he had requested.

Everybody felt gay. Tucker Dan sat on the right of the doctor, and Mickey sat sandwiched between the twins over

opposite. Aunt Amy presided at the head of the table because Nunc Binny "hated so like thunder to do the carving." All were attired in their best and Nunc Binny had brilliantined his bald head specially for the occasion.

Aunt Amy said grace, giving thanks for what had come, and for what was coming, even if it was always to be but a small favor. Mick looked at Tucker and wondered if he had understood that small favors were always acceptable to Aunt Amy; Tuck looked at Mick and started the conversation by remarking that fishing was good, in the lake back of the house. Doc Nash chimed in and said that the last time he went fishing on that lake was twenty-seven years before, and that Nunc Binny was with him then but wouldn't stay because he wanted to see Aunt Amy home from kindergarten. Aunt Amy mentally figured out that

that proved she wasn't over thirty now and smiled like a pleased child at the doctor.

Mr. Martin remarked that time flew, and that he couldn't realize it was so long ago that he was escorting Mrs. Martin home from the same kindergarten. Mrs. Martin was years older than Aunt Amy, and she enjoyed the chronological lie, too. Every one knew that every one else was bluffing and felt happy; as a matter-of-fact neither of the ladies was a day under forty.

But the crowd got to devouring the beefsteak finally, and Salvina nearly choked herself wondering what Tuck was going to do. There was a brief lull in the conversation while the doctor asked for a third cut, remarking that men of his size couldn't stand on ceremony, and that nature had to be fed.

Then Tuck caught his friend's eye,

and Michael Connor edged in a word.

"Ever see a tarantula, Doc?" he queried. "You've been in the South, ain't yer?"

Dr. Nash braced up. "Surely," he said, "surely; I've seen lots of them in the Indies."

Mickey felt nervous.

"Do they sting?"

"Do they sting? Well now I don't know whether they sting or bite, but they're awful when they get in their work. They are killers."

"What do they look like, Doc?" queried Tuck.

"They look like hairy crabs with fuzzy legs. They're really spiders—awful big ones. They walk right up, crawl silently around your ankles, and before you know it they hook on."

Dr. Nash was helping the game

along beautifully, but he didn't know it.

Aunt Amy and the girl had just cleared off the table and brought a magnificent plum pudding for dessert. Aunt Amy served it while Mr. Connor, senior, who had grown interested in tarantulas, remarked that he saw one once with a body as big as a hen's egg, and legs as long as his fingers, come out of a bunch of bananas from Jamaica.

Everybody shuddered, and Aunt Amy looked towards a bunch of bananas hanging in the kitchen.

Tuck, seeing his opportunity, suddenly dropped his jaw and looked at Nunc Binny with a scared expression.

"I saw a terrible big spider come out of that bunch of bananas in the kitchen the other day; I thought it was a ball of black yarn at first."

Uncle Binny looked worried. "Where did it go, Tuck?"

"It walked sideways into the hole on the porch. Do you suppose it was a tarantula, Nunc?"

"No—impossible. Imagination!"

"I don't know," mused Mickey in turn. "I saw a big thing like a spider just now in the kitchen—that's why I asked about tarantulas."

Both the fabricators kept sober faces, and the ladies were already fussing around their skirts.

Tucker frowned at Mickey; it was the signal agreed upon, and Mick pulled a string that opened the trap under the table. The mouse, whose foot was attached to the trap by a long piece of thread, meandered forth silently and gazed at the row of ankles beneath the table.

Tuck asked for some water and Aunt

Amy filled his glass, while Dr. Nash started to tell a story.

Then the mouse got busy.

Aunt Amy felt a gentle tug at her ankle—and thought hard. She looked suddenly sick, and then Tuck knew the scheme was all right.

Next moment Aunt Amy felt a something certainly crawling on her ankle. She quit thinking then and there, and jumping gracefully upon the chair with both feet, swung her right heel and landed right in the centre of the plum pudding, yelling, "I've got 'em—tarantulas!"

Everybody stood up at once as she butted her head on the table.

Dr. Nash responded promptly and seized Aunt Amy gently but firmly.

"Hysterics, ladies and gentlemen," he said; "too much tarantula talk."

Poor Aunt Amy quieted down after a

minute, and the mouse reached Nunc Binny's ankle for a change.

"Hysterics be damned," he shouted as he vaulted over the table. "*It's tarantulas!*" The finishings of the dinner came after him onto the floor and the boys started to pick him up.

Now Dr. Nash felt a bite. He jumped hastily for the door, but reconsidered, as it was too far, and putting one leg out of the window, started to pull the other after him, but couldn't.

Everybody looked at him in amazement, and Tuck inquired,

"What's the matter, Doc?"

"Shove my leg out of the window, will you?" he cried. "I've got an important engagement."

He fell out with the boys' aid, and the others who had partly recovered saw him disappear across the fields like a hunted bear.

Then everybody went to wondering what it was they had felt until they discovered the trap;—then they looked for Tucker and his friend Mickey.

They couldn't be found. They were in the woods, where Mickey was remarking,

"That there mouse must have broke loose, Tuck. Doc has got him, I guess. Did yer ever see such a stunt, Pils?"

"It went too far. I thought it would go to Nunc Binny—he was the nearest."

"Sure," assented Mick. "Yer ain't responsible for all a mouse does."

"That depends upon what Nunc Binny thinks," smiled Tucker Dan; "but it was the best we ever did, Mick,—and it's my last."

Just then Mr. Binny came running from the house, and the pair heard him shouting, "Dr. Nash is wanted—find him, somebody!"

It was a truce for a while; the boys came out of hiding and with Nunc Binny started after the doctor.

"There's a terrible accident on the railroad, boys. Dr. Nash's office just 'phoned us. His horse is being hitched now.—Hurry!"

They scoured the woods and the fields near by, then from a rolling hill they took in the landscape.

"There's something like a cow sitting down way over there," exclaimed Nunc Binny.

"It's Doc Nash on a stump," corrected the boys. "He's resting."

They reached him finally. He was all played out; his face was beaded with sweat, and he looked half scared to death.

"What's the matter?" exclaimed Uncle Binny.

"Matter—*matter!* Do you suppose I wanted everybody to see me cavorting

round like a fool. I came out here to cavort, you idiot;—I've got tarantulas. Darn 'em—I'm sitting on 'em."

"Well, Doc, you'd better move along. There's an accident, and your team will be at my place in a few minutes. The calls of humanity are shrieking for you."

"Let 'em yell—let 'em holler! I'm sorry for the unfortunates, but doggone it—I am delayed on a pressing engagement. I'm pressing tarantulas!—I don't dare move."

Tucker and Mickey began to laugh, and Mr. Binny remarked,

"It's only hysterics, doctor."

"Hysterics be darned! I know a bite—a dozen bites—from hysterics, you bald-headed loon."

"How many tarantulas do you suppose there were, Tucker?" queried the doctor, more quietly.

"We found eleven tarantula nests on

the bunch of bananas, Doc," answered the boy with a serious face.

"Eleven—by gosh. I've got 'em all then. I've got a regiment of animals under me."

Tucker saw the doctor's team in the distance and relented. "It ain't tarantulas. It's only one mouse, Doc. Mick and I were having fun."

After a long minute the physician got up and shook himself, and a weak mouse trotted off into the corn-field.

Then Dr. Nash seized Tucker Dan and Mickey by the collars and said, suppressing his appreciation of the joke as well as he could,

"Will you two swear not to tell about this? If you do it will hurt my business."

Neither boy swore.

"If you swear, Nunc Binny won't whip you."

Neither boy said a word.

"If you don't swear, I'll fix you—you pirates. You forget I've got your records. I'm on the Board of Health; and I'll have you vaccinated where it will hurt like the dickens to slide to second base. No more baseball this year."

Tucker Dan threw up his right hand. "I swear," he said.

Mickey threw up both hands. "Me too," he murmured; "me too."

When they got back to the house the team was just arriving, and all the others of the party were on the porch.

Dr. Nash, his face no longer showing suppressed levity but grave and earnest, the face of the man ready for any emergency, jumped into the carriage with amazing agility for one of his size.

"Remember, boys," he said warningly, —"remember!" and turning to his driver calmly ordered,

"Jim, drive like Sam Hill."

They watched him disappear in the distance at a fearful speed, and Mr. Martin remarked, "Doctor is a nice fellow."

"Yes," assented Aunt Amy as she put her arms on Binny's shoulders, "he's just like this fellow. He's nice—and a 'dead game sport.'"

They all chuckled.

"You bet. No flies on Doc—and no *tarantulas*," grinned Tucker Dan.

THE END

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